

Acts 5:12-42

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[0 : 00] What will come of this church?

If someone stopped you at the door when you walked in this morning and asked you that question, what would you have said? As you interact on a weekly basis with the various ways in which this body works in small groups and service opportunities and ministries, what do you think the future is for this church?

Maybe a different way of asking the question is, what does God have for this church and its future? Do you have hopes?

Do you have expectations for what will come of this church? Now, some of you may be visiting here for the first time and you're wondering, what is this church all about?

Where is it going? And many of you have been weathered the last pastoral transition years of wondering, what will God do with this church?

[1 : 33] And I stand before you this morning and I confess that I am remarkably hopeful. I'm a glass half empty kind of guy, not half full.

But when I look at what God has done in this church, I am hopeful. When I look at the history from its beginning in the 70s, the remarkable growth in ministry that it had, the strange wilderness years that some of you have endured in the 80s and early 90s, the remarkable provision of God in the late 90s of a pastor, and then a few years later of a building when the rental we had before was done. But more than that, I've seen God preserve this church through internal conflict, challenges that threaten to break it apart. I've seen this church survive through long periods of wandering and wondering and waiting.

And most of all, I've seen God use this church to change lives. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed. People have been brought from darkness to light.

People's lives have been changed. And so, most of the time, I'm actually pretty hopeful. There are times, though, when I doubt.

[3 : 13] There are times when I wonder. There are times when I wonder. What will come of this church? In the passage that we're going to look at this morning in Acts chapter 5, if you want to turn with me in your Bibles there, it's page 774.

I think it will speak to us about how God might want us to think about this question. About what God might have for this church.

About what will come of this church. Let's read this passage together. We're going to start in chapter 5, verse 12, and read to the end of chapter 5.

Again, page 774, if you read along with me. The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.

And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's colonnade. No one else dared join them. Even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

[4 : 18] As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.

Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits. And all of them were healed. And then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

They arrested the apostles and put them in public jail. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. Go, stand in the temple courts, he said, and tell the people the full message of this new life.

At daybreak, they entered the temple courts, as they've been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priests and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin, the full assembly of the elders of Israel, and sent to the jail for the apostles.

But on arriving at the jail, the officials, officers, did not find them there. So they went back and reported, We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors.

[5 : 34] But when we opened them, we found no one inside. On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering, What would come of this?

Then someone came and said, Look, the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts, teaching the people. And at that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles.

They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.

We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, he said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.

Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than man. The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

[6 : 41] God exalted him to his own right hand, as prince and savior, that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

When they heard this, they were furious, and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin, and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.

Then he addressed them. Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.

Some time ago, Thutis appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about 400 men rallied to him.

He was killed, and all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. And after him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census, and led a band of people in revolt.

He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case, I advise you, leave these men alone. Let them go.

[7 : 49] For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.

You will find yourselves fighting against God. His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in, and had them flogged.

Then they ordered them, not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name.

Day after day in the temple courts, and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news, that Jesus is the Christ. Let's pray.

Lord, we ask this morning that you would give us eyes to see Jesus.

[8 : 51] Lord, I pray that you would, by your spirit, open our minds and our hearts to your word, that, Lord, we might see Jesus the way these men did, these women did, the early apostles.

Lord, open our eyes, Lord, that we might see him and know him as they did. Lord, I pray that you would speak this morning to us through your word.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. What will come of this church? We've entitled our sermon series, When God Builds His Church, because this seems to be an underlying question that flows throughout the whole book of Acts.

Why did God include the book of Acts in the Bible? Because it is a record of God building his church. It is the record of Jesus working after his resurrection to build his church.

And what we've seen in the flow so far in the first four chapters, first five chapters of Acts, has been God doing miraculous things, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the gospel, the conversion of many people.

[10 : 12] Signs and wonders are being done. But also, increasing opposition. Increasing internal challenges of hypocrisy and corruption.

And it brings to our mind the question, what will happen to this church? We stand 20 centuries later, and we look back and we know what happened.

But if you were a believer that early day, would you have thought, maybe Jesus is just another Thutis, or just another Judas of Galilee. Maybe this is all going to just fail.

And we see the narrative structure to bring us to the point that Gamaliel brings us. Is this of God or not? And if it is, what does God have for us?

And as we ask these questions, as we think about what will become of the church, of our church, what I want you to see is this, that God builds an unstoppable church with men and women who cherish the supremacy of Christ.

[11:26] God builds an unstoppable church with men and women who cherish the supremacy of Christ. I hope you will see this this morning from our text.

Let me tell you what we're going to do. First, we're going to walk through the narrative so we understand a little bit more of its flow and how it brings us to this point of seeing an unstoppable church that cherishes the supremacy of Christ.

I want to explore the significance of the supremacy of Christ in our own lives. And then I'm going to finish by looking at two characteristics of this unstoppable church in application for us today.

First, let's look at this narrative together. The narrative breaks down into a series of movements. The first movement is verses 12 through 17. And what we see here is God doing miraculous things. It said, through the apostles, God is doing signs and wonders. People are being healed. People are being delivered. from impure spirits to such an extent that the people outside of Jerusalem are bringing their sick and their hurting to Jerusalem.

[12:39] If this had happened today, it would have been on the nightly news every night. Yet again, another day of amazing things happening in Jerusalem. Luke is just setting the scene for what's going to happen after this by saying God is doing amazing things.

And I want to stop and give you, just briefly, take a time out. Because we've seen this a couple of times in the book of Acts and we have never had on asked the question, should these signs and wonders be things that we should expect today?

Should God be doing these things at Trinity? First, let me say this. Consistently throughout the scriptures and particularly in the book of Acts, signs and wonders have a role to play.

They are attesting to the truthfulness of the gospel and the reality of who Jesus Christ is as the crucified and risen Savior. Secondly, though I think you can see a pattern in scripture where these signs and wonders are often things that God does at particular times in the development of redemptive history, for instance, through Moses and the signs in Egypt or through Elijah, I do think it is overstated that God would not, will not or cannot do these things today.

I think God can do these things and that we can ask him to do miraculous and supernatural things. But this leads me to my final observation and that is that a miracle is by definition something that defies a normal, natural working of cause and effect in the world.

[14:32] These signs and wonders were like that. And I think God is doing miraculous signs and wonders today. But they don't always look like they did in the first century.

Is God not doing a miracle when he preserves a marriage that by all accounts would have failed long ago but for Christ? Is God not doing a miracle when he sustains a brother or sister through chronic depression or illness?

Is God not doing a miracle when he breaks the power of addiction, transforms life patterns? Is God not doing a miracle when a single brother or sister is sustained in sexual purity year after year after year with no prospect of a spouse on the horizon?

Is God not doing a miracle when financial provision is made for something that there's no human reason to expect? Though these may be less public than healings and deliverance from impure spirits, God is doing miraculous things today.

And God calls us to expect him to work not just according to the normal ways that the world works but to work in ways that will turn upside down our expectations so that we can see that it is of God and not of us.

[16:12] That's the end of my excursus on that. But I felt like we needed to address that about signs and wonders. And Luke sets this story up to say, God is doing these things.

And it provokes a response. In verses 18 through 26, we see the religious leaders opposing the preaching of the gospel, opposing the ministry of the apostles.

When you look through this, it's actually kind of humorous. As they enter in, they're trying to silence these men and women and to prevent them from continuing. They arrest them.

They want to intimidate them so they put them in public jail. But God delivers them and says, go back and preach. The scene where the Sanhedrin gathers and says, call the prisoners and they're

not there.

You're supposed to see that Luke is telling the story to see that God has undermined the authority of these men. And he keeps doing it. Where are they? Well, they're back doing the very thing you arrested them to stop them from doing.

[17:18] And when they finally go and say to get the apostles again, they can't even arrest them again. They're afraid of the crowd.

So they're like, hey, can you guys come with us? The Sanhedrin would like a word with you. They have no authority left. They have no power left. The apostles come.

And it brings us to this confrontation, which is in some ways is the centerpiece of the content of this whole story. The authorities bring two charges against the disciples.

You have filled Jerusalem with this teaching and you have blamed us for Jesus' death. You have put his blood on us. And despite the dire nature of the situation, the threat before them, Peter boldly says, we plead guilty on both accounts.

Why can he say this? Look with me in verses 29 through 31. This is where we see why, how, Peter and the apostles could be an unstoppable church.

[18:32] verse 29. Look at how Peter says it. We must obey God rather than men. Peter's not expressing a rebellious spirit or an anti-authoritarianism or an independence.

He is expressing a divine compulsion. I must obey God rather than man. I can't do anything else. Why does he say that?

Look at what he says as he goes on in verse 30. He says, God raised up Jesus whom you disgraced by hanging on a tree.

God exalted him, this Jesus, as, in the NIV it says, Prince and Savior at God's right hand.

Peter has this boldness because he sees that Jesus is this Prince and this Savior. The word Prince here is used in a couple other places.

[19:39] Interestingly, it's back in Acts 3. If you were here last time I preached, in Acts 3, Peter calls Jesus the author of life. It's the same word as here for Prince.

The idea behind it is one who has authority, one who has the ability the ability to create and bring to us what we need. It's also in Hebrews 12, 2, the well-known, that Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith.

Again, that word author there. Jesus is the Prince of our lives. He has authority and He rules over everything.

He is a Savior. And as He goes on, He says, He is a Savior who is able to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin. This is the very core of the gospel, is it not?

That Jesus Christ came and lived and died and rose again that He might conquer sin and death.

That He might be able to offer forgiveness to all who believe in Him, who trust in His death for their salvation.

[20:48] And for Peter, if Jesus could save me from my sin and death, He can save me from anything. The God of our forefathers, the same God you, Sanhedrin, claim to believe in, He has exalted this Jesus in this way.

We are witnesses to it. We have seen Him raised from the dead. We have seen Him give the Holy Spirit and the outworking of it. And you, you have dishonored Him.

You have denied Him. And you have opposed Him. So who would you obey? God or man? God but note that there is still an appeal there.

Peter is, even in his confrontation of those authorities, he is saying, this Jesus is able to give repentance to Israel. To you, oh brothers of the Sanhedrin, to you today, you can still see this Jesus as He really is.

In His supremacy. In His Lord and Savior role. Well, the Sanhedrin isn't real happy about this, are they?

[22:13] If you look, it says, look with me in this, verse 33. It says, they were furious. Other translations say, they were enraged.

They wanted to kill them on the spot. Just pull out the Uzis and mow them down. Just get it over with. But notice that this is not the end of the story.

And as we read this as a story, this is not the most tense part of the whole thing. In fact, what we see is that there's one more movement. God raises up a man, Gamaliel, who's highly respected.

And he gets up and he says, brothers, brothers, brothers, think about this for a moment. Now, he is no believer. He is no supporter of Jesus.

He is a pragmatic man. But he's saying, remember what's happened before? These guys would come along and they'd claim to be something.

[23 : 12] Then they'd die and it would go away. That's probably the case here. Don't you think? What if it isn't? And he just leaves this room and Luke, this is the point that Luke wants us to see.

If this is from God, if this is God's origin, if God is doing this, you will not be able to stop it. Not only will you not be able to stop it, but you will find yourself opposing God himself.

Luke is saying to his readers, look at this. God is building his church. Gamaliel poses it as a question, but Luke has no question in his mind.

Luke is saying, look at what God is doing. this church is unstoppable. This church is unstoppable. And he's making it unstoppable because he's raising up men and women who, like Peter, see how supreme, how wonderful, how exalted Jesus is in his authority and saving power.

power. And he's making those women to cherish that and to make it everything. These men and women, for these men and women, there's no authority to challenge Jesus.

[24 : 45] There's no power greater than him. And that makes an unstoppable church. When I say unstoppable, I want to make sure I'm clear because in our day, you could be thinking an unstoppable church, that sounds pretty triumphalistic, doesn't it?

But in this passage, unstoppable doesn't mean that we're winning culture wars. It doesn't mean that we're transforming geopolitical realities. What it means is that the church is an irrepressible, unquenchable reality in this world.

A movement of God that cannot be stopped. Multiple times in this passage, the church is told, stop. Stop preaching Jesus. Stop telling others about Jesus.

Stop doing this. And as Luke portrays this, the church says, we cannot. We cannot stop because of who Jesus is.

I want to stop and think for a moment for us. If Jesus really is supreme in his authority and power, what does that mean for us? If Jesus really is the ruler of all things, then we don't fear any other authority.

[26 : 14] If he's the ruler of our boss, he is the ruler of our boss who wants us to cut, who may want us to cut corners or to, quote unquote, live in the real world by disregarding honesty and integrity in our business.

He is the ruler over our graduate advisors who call us to abandon aspects of our Christian worldview in order to be more acceptable in academia.

He is the ruler over the mean girls and the bullies in your school who make violating your Christian faith a requirement for acceptance and popularity.

Jesus is not only the ruler but the savior of all things because he saved us from sin. Do we believe that he will deliver us in every way? Will he deliver us in a season of unemployment with bleak prospects of finding a new job to provide for our family?

Will he deliver us when postpartum depression sucks the very life out of us, the very time when we are most needed to care for little ones at home? Will he be our deliverer when we fail secretly or spectacularly in sin and are overwhelmed with shame and guilt?

[27 : 40] We want to run and hide rather than confess, repent, and receive grace. You see, church, when we see Christ as this supreme authority, as this final savior, deliverer, we can cherish him.

Cherish him in his supremacy. And God builds his church. Do you see this today in our church?

Do you see it in the Trinity? Do we see Jesus the way these early apostles did? Do we see Jesus the way these early apostles did? Luke goes on, verses 41 and 42, and he gives us, finally, two pictures of what it might look like for a church that is captivated and captured by this supreme Jesus.

What an unstoppable church might look like. First, in verse 41, look with me at it. The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering for the name.

Suffering disgrace for the name. One of the things we need to see is that as God builds his church, as God builds an unstoppable church, it is not a life of ease.

[29 : 12] It is not a path of greater success without cost. In fact, it is a picture of the promise that we've seen throughout Scripture that those who would follow Christ will suffer for him and with him.

For much of the world today, this is still a very real reality. If you read an email from Stanley and Laura last week, you would see that for them and their ministry in Central Asia, this is a very real reality of their physical suffering for the gospel.

but it's instructive and I think helpful to recognize that Luke clarifies by saying not just suffering in a physical sense but suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus.

Obviously, suffering for being foolish or obstinate or unkind is not suffering for the name of Jesus. suffering by just being socially obtuse and uncaring is not suffering for Jesus.

But I think that there are very real ways that we may suffer for Jesus today. Identifying with Christ at school may make you regarded as approved or self-righteous or holier-than-thou.

[30 : 46] Identifying with Christ at a local PTA meeting will cause others to be suspicious of your agenda, wondering if you want to co-opt the school system. Identifying with Christ at work may result in being overlooked for a promotion, being labeled as not a team player, excluded from business opportunities.

Identifying with Christ in academia may make you dismissed as foolish, lacking in intellect or ability. Disgrace for the name of Christ. Will we have the boldness, the courage of conviction?

Are we so captured by the supremacy of Christ that we do not only receive these, but we rejoice in them.

Because when we rejoice in suffering for the name of Christ, it is because we understand that to suffer for the name of Christ is to honor him above all things. And even more than that, it is to have deeper fellowship with him.

[32 : 02] Paul in Philippians 3 says, I want to know Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings being joined with him in his death so that I may be with him in his resurrection.

Brothers and sisters, this is how joy and suffering may happen. Because we see that in these circumstances where we are potentially going to suffer disgrace or harm, we see how wonderful it is to honor Christ and how precious it is to understand more deeply his suffering for us.

So we may rejoice. The unstoppable church that is captivated by the supremacy of Christ will rejoice in suffering first of all and then finally, secondly, verse 42, it will be bold.

Be bold in telling others about Jesus. It is remarkable to me that the disciples, the apostles in this story go back to the temple twice, after they've already been threatened, after they've already been beaten, warned, after they've already been warned.

They go back to the very place where it's hardest. Because that's where people go to meet with God. And they can't think of a different place that would be better than going to the temple to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, Jesus as the fulfillment of the hope of all the things that everyone goes to the temple for.

[33 : 50] Jesus is the one who has the ultimate authority and the ability to save. And so they have great boldness. But Luke says not only do they go to the temple, but they also go from house to house.

And it seems here that the picture that Luke is portraying is of people who are so full of how wonderful Jesus is that they gossip the gospel.

They say to others, have you heard? Have you heard about Jesus? Did you hear how wonderful he is? Do you know he set me free from sin? Do you know how great his grace and love is?

Can you imagine that we can know him? That he can make us his? It's not boldness standing up with a foghorn on a street corner simply simply to blare at people.

But it's boldness that overflows. Because Christ is everything. Christ is all. That was true for the early church.

[35 : 05] That's what the unstoppable church captivated by the supremacy of Christ really looks like. God's love. I know it's hard.

I struggle with this. I struggle to open my mouth in the moments I fear man rather than rejoicing in God.

God's love. God's love. But will you pray with me O Trinity for this church that we might be so filled with the wonder of Christ.

The supremacy of Christ. The greatness of Christ. That we would have boldness to go and that we would overflow with the gospel.

So what will come of this church? What will God do with Trinity?

[36 : 09] If you've been listening this morning and you've heard this message as an exhortation simply to try harder to cherish Jesus then I've failed. That's not the message of this text.

The message of this text is that God is building his church and I believe that God is building this church and he's doing it by putting in his people a cherishing of the supremacy of Christ that is everything in their lives.

as Christ as God does this he makes us unstoppable irrepressible unquenchable we are not called to try harder to be better Christians we are called to run to Jesus to look to him in his cross and in his resurrection and to plead with God oh God have mercy on us that we might be captivated captured by this Jesus and that he might allow us to be this unstoppable church for his glory let's pray Lord we we look at this picture of the church and we struggle to see

Lord could this really be could it really be for us that you would do these things oh Lord I believe that I believe that you do and I believe that you can Lord will you we pray you will Lord make trinity an unstoppable church for the glory of Christ in the glory of Christ we pray these things in Jesus name amen