**To Fill the City**

Acts 5:12-42

Verse 28 summarizes Acts chapter 5 for us today.

“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here ***you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching***, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” Acts 5:28

The High Priest was confronting the apostles for flagrantly ***disobeying the Jewish council’s command*** to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. After Peter and John healed the crippled man in chapter 3, they were ordered in chapter 4 to stop preaching. But remember back then Peter and John said, “We must obey God rather than men!” as they did again here in chapter 5.

Verse 17 gives us a glimpse into ***the hearts of the Jewish leaders***.

“But the high priest rose up… and ***filled with jealousy*** they arrested the apostles… ‘You have ***filled Jerusalem with your teaching***.’” Acts 4:17,28

The High Priest and the teachers of the Jewish law felt they were the only ones worthy to preach and teach in the name of God. **They were jealous** of other preachers attracting people to follow them. And, if we’re honest, isn’t this often how WE FEEL ***when other churches in town grow*** and we don’t? Are we filled with JEALOUSY of their growth and their popularity, or do we REJOICE that the city is more filled with the gospel of Jesus?

**Church growth** is a good thing, but we must be careful not to let it become a GOD THING - ***an idol in our hearts***. Church growth is too small a goal. We want our church to grow, but not at the expense of other Gospel-preaching churches. We want our church to grow as part of **a bigger movement of God that fills the city** with the love and truth of Jesus Christ!

We need a **city-reaching vision**. This is our mission as a church - to transform people ***and communities*** with the gospel! Ultimately our mission is to see the entire city of Tampa Bay transformed by the Gospel - **to fill the city** with the teaching of Jesus. Acts 5 gives us ***a roadmap to follow*** in pursuit of this vision with **four keys** to filling a region with the Gospel; 4 keys to Gospel Saturation.

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Authority** to preach the Gospel

“And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.” Acts 5:11

As you can see in your outline today, these keys flow right from **the Great Commission**, and we see the apostles following and fulfilling the pattern established in Matthew 28 and Acts 1. Jesus sent them out with His authority and with clear instructions. They were simply following orders in obedience to their Lord.

Verse 11 concluded the story from last week about the deaths of ***Ananias and Sapphira*** - a sober warning about the need for holiness in the church and a very public incident confirming the authority of Peter and the apostles. “Great fear” settled on the church and all in the community - a deep reverence for God and the leaders appointed by Jesus to lead the church. That same reverence and awe continues to grow in verse 12.

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Authority** to preach the Gospel

“Many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.” Acts 5:12

The signs and miracles Jesus performed confirmed His identity and authority as the Son of God. The signs and wonders the apostles performed **confirmed their authority** to continue to speak and act in Jesus’ name. Remember when God spoke from heaven at Jesus’ baptism and at the transfiguration to explicitly state “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him!” the same thing is happening here. God is placing His seal of approval on the apostles - saying, ***“These are my faithful servants - listen to them!”***

Remember, they did not have any of the New Testament yet. All they had was the 12 apostles, and eventually Paul. So it was essential that the early church know who to listen to, and who NOT TO listen to. This chapter makes it clear that there was ***tremendous pressure among the religious leaders*** in Jerusalem to maintain control and protect “orthodox” Judaism. The apostles were introducing a true revolution to Israel and the Roman Empire. And it was definitely catching on!

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Authority** to preach the Gospel

“The people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” Acts 5:13-14

Word is spreading about this Jesus who died and rose again. And now word was spreading about the apostles in Jerusalem who acted with the authority and power of Jesus!

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Authority** to preach the Gospel

“They even carried out the sick… that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them… and they were all healed.” Acts 5:15-16

This is exactly what Jesus did - great crowds came to Him to be healed and to have demons cast out. Now the apostles continue that ministry, with the same remarkable power. “They were ALL healed.”

I keep reminding us - ***stories like this are not for us to try to replicate.*** This was a once in history moment. I do believe miracles and healings still happen, but not 100%, not with the passing of a shadow over them. Trust me, **my shadow does not have any healing qualities**, as far as I know. And obviously neither did Peter’s. It was the power of Jesus flowing through Peter and the apostles. That was the point. **God was marking out the twelve as His ambassadors**. He was stamping them with His authority like a King pressing his signet ring into the seal of a letter. “These guys are with me. They act under my authority, in my name.”

The transferable point for us is that **we have the same authority the apostles did**.

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Authority** to preach the Gospel

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go...’” Matthew 28:18

***Peter was nothing special.*** John, James, Andrew - nothing special about those guys. They were ordinary guys. If anything they were quite fallible and easily confused. But they had been with Jesus. And once they were filled with the Holy Spirit the power of Jesus began to flow through them. And that’s the point - it was JESUS’ power - it was HIS authority. This wasn’t about Peter. It wasn’t about the apostles. It was about Jesus.

And that’s how it should be for us. We don’t share the gospel because WE are so confident or so impressive and powerful. We share the gospel **because JESUS is so impressive and powerful**. We act on HIS authority. We have been sent by the King of Kings Himself!

Teens, if your ***Dad gave you his credit card*** and sent you to Publix to get some milk, you would do it, right? You would have his authority to use that card. Now, if you went to the Apple store and bought yourself an iPhone 12 your Dad would have some words for you when that bill came due. But if Dad sent you, then you have his resources at your disposal as long as you use them as intended.

Take that to the next level and say the **Joint Chiefs of the U.S. Military** gave you an assignment to lead a covert military operation and rescue some hostages - you would move out with the authority and resources of the Navy Seals (and they would say, “Who in the world are you and why are YOU leading us?”). It’s a question of AUTHORITY.

***We have the authority of Jesus Christ the Lord.*** All authority in heaven and on earth has been entrusted to Him by God the Father. This world is His and all that is in it. There is no power or authority, not human leader, no demon or the devil himself that can supersede the power of Jesus. We have been sent by the Lord to act in His name, on His behalf. And that leads to our second key. What have we been sent to do?

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Commission** to preach the Gospel

“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” Acts 5:20

The high priest and the religious leaders said, “Stop it! No more preaching in Jesus’ name.” And they locked the apostles up. But ***the angel of the Lord rescued them***, simply opening the prison doors, and said, “Get back out there. Get back to the temple and keep preaching the Gospel!”

And the apostles immediately obeyed. Right at dawn the next day they went to the temple and started teaching again about Jesus. It was **a comical moment** when the Jewish leaders went to the prison to find the men they had locked up only to be told:

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Commission** to preach the Gospel

“We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” Acts 5:23

Those guards must have been really mystified. They stood there all night, guarding that securely locked prison cell. But in the morning, the 12 min in the prison were gone. Disappeared! How did the angel do it? Did he stun the guards so they temporarily blacked out? We don’t know. But we do know that ***when God wants us to preach, He can remove any obstacle so we can share the good news.***

And that is our mission. We have been sent by our King with clear orders to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to that command begins with a commitment to regularly share the Gospel. It doesn’t end with evangelism as we must train believers to follow Jesus. ***But obedience to the teachings of Jesus BEGINS with evangelism.***

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Commission** to preach the Gospel

“We must obey God rather than men… We are witnesses of these things.” Acts 5:29,32

When commanded to be quiet, the apostles said, “We can’t obey you because we must obey God! And He has sent us out as His witnesses!”

***So how would you grade yourself in this area?*** From 1-10, are you a 10, constantly talking Jesus up? Or are you a 1, rarely - if ever - telling anyone about Jesus?

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/study-most-churchgoers-never-share-the-gospel/>

A 2012 study by Lifeway found that asked regular churchgoers if they had invited any unchurched people to their church in the last six months - **half of them** (48%) said no; not once. Another 30% said “once or twice.” So 80% of REGULAR churchgoers in America barely engage with anyone outside of the church even to INVITE them. This wasn’t even asking about sharing the gospel - it was just about making a simple invite to church or a church program or group. Only 20% had invited 3 or more people in 6 months.

So WHY? Why have Christians become so reserved in our outreach? One reason, found in a Barna study in 2018, is that most churchgoers believe it is the CHURCH’s responsibility to reach outsiders, ***not THEIR responsibility***. Isn’t that interesting? Individual Christians who are regular in a church don’t feel that they - the individual believers - are responsible to reach out in the community but that the CHURCH is. In other words, the paid professionals in the church are. We pay pastors to preach - they should preach! Get out there pastor!

<https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>

The New Testament leaves no room for this thinking. **Every believer** ***has been sent by the Lord to make disciples.*** Every one of us. It will certainly look different based on your personality, life stage and interests. But none of us are exempt. All of us have been commissioned by the Lord to reach out to the people around us.

I was struck by this over the summer as the elders studied The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman. It’s a simple but powerful book on how Jesus changed the world by training his disciples to make disciples. One of the eight practices of Jesus was **DEMONSTRATION**. He showed them how to do it. And of course, when you think about Jesus’ life, that is obvious. For three years Jesus led them all around Israel, engaging with all kinds of people - every day. Rich, poor, men, women, old, young, religious, non-religious, “righteous,” and sinners. All kinds of people.

***Jesus showed the disciples, for over a year***, how to preach to a crowd and how to love and touch a leper. He modeled, over and over again, how to adjust your schedule and plans to minister to the needs of hurting people. And then, after showing them for a year or more, he sent them out to do it.

This struck me because ***I am pretty good at TELLING you all to go share the gospel***. And I can usually illustrate that with one or two cool stories each year. But I realized this summer that I am just as guilty as those 80% in America of not REGULARLY engaging with non-believers. ***I have become just as isolated, just as isolated in the Christian bubble.***  
  
It’s not that I don’t WANT to reach out to lost people. ***I simply don’t know any!*** So we made some small adjustments to our schedule and routines to create more space in our lives for non-believers. Jason and I stopped meeting in the office and now meet ***every Thursday morning in Panera***. Just by being there at Panera we are getting to know the regulars, and having more frequent opportunities to invite people to church.

The last two years I have coached soccer at Idlewild with our youngest son Micah. This year, since we have a few Oakwood families who live near us, we got together and decided to do a little ***soccer game on Saturday mornings*** right in our own neighborhood. We promoted it on our local facebook page and through that have started getting to know a half dozen or more neighbors.

***What adjustments*** could you make to **YOUR LIFE** to create more space to connect with non-believers? It might mean meeting every other week with your small group instead of every week. It might mean planning one or two meals every month with someone outside of the church.

What is **a reasonable goal** for you when it comes to sharing your faith? Are you content with one or two “random” opportunities every year? Or do you want to start praying for opportunities ***every MONTH, every WEEK, every DAY?*** Take baby steps in this area. You don’t decide on Monday to start running and then go run a marathon on Saturday. You make small adjustments and over time they become big lifestyle changes.

***The American church needs an overhaul.*** We need to reorient around the Great Commission. We have slowly and steadily grown INWARD, but Jesus is sending us OUTWARD.

We have the authority of Jesus and the clear commission from Jesus to preach the Gospel. This is our mission! But let’s keep going in Acts 5 for our 3rd key to filling the region with the gospel - our expectation.

1. Our **Expectation** in preaching the Gospel
   * God’s Word will always be **Opposed**

“Filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.” Acts 5:17-18

We have Jesus’ authority and His command to share the gospel - but we also have **His example** of what happened when He preached the kingdom. He said, ***“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.”*** Jesus’ road led Him to a Roman cross, and the same destination awaited the 12 apostles. We are foolish to expect a warm reception to the Gospel from everyone.

Yes, there will be those who are ready to hear and respond - praise the Lord, let it be so! But there will also be those who will do all they can to fight against this message. ***It is a spiritual war!*** Look at the reaction of the Jews when they found the apostles preaching again in the Temple.

1. Our **Expectation** in preaching the Gospel
   * God’s Word will always be **Opposed**

“When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.” Acts 5:33

This is Acts chapter 5. In Acts **chapter 7** we will see the ***first Christian killed*** for his testimony - Stephen, one of the first deacons appointed. In **Acts 8** ***a great persecution*** breaks out, led by Saul the Pharisee, and all of the believers were scattered. And in **Acts 12** ***James the brother of John*** is executed and Peter is arrested again. Persecution and opposition runs through the gospel accounts and it runs through the book of Acts - as it has through all of Christian history. There are times of peace and there are times of great persecution.

As we follow Jesus we should ***expect to be treated as He was treated*** and as the apostles were treated. So we should be prepared to face opposition and increasing persecution. And, as I’ve said before, we should be prepared for this to escalate exponentially if the end times do suddenly descend upon us. We may look back on COVID-19 and the deaths in 2020 as a mercy from God to spare certain people the many challenges of the Great Tribulation.

1. Our **Expectation** in preaching the Gospel
   * God’s Word will always be **Opposed**
   * God’s people will always be **Protected**
   * God will always call **Some** to respond

So we have **three expectations** as we preach the Gospel: first, ***we brace ourselves for opposition*** because God’s Word has always been and will always be opposed. Second, we know God will always protect us. In this case He directly delivered the apostles from prison. At other times, when believers were executed physically their protection was spiritual. But we need not fear the wrath of man because we have the protection of God!

And third, we pray and trust that there will always be ***some who will respond***. The apostles in Jerusalem got large doses of both opposition and response. We tend to get small doses of both. But the expectation is the same. Many will be ambivalent. Some will fuss and fight. And some will have ears to hear and hearts ready to respond. So we keep moving forward. We keep loving our neighbors, we keep praying for the lost, we keep reaching out and ***we keep sharing the gospel.*** And that is the fourth key to seeing the whole city filled with the Gospel.

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Perseverance** in preaching the Gospel

“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” Acts 5:41

Persecution and suffering for Jesus is a badge of honor and a cause for rejoicing. There is a ***fellowship with Jesus that is magnified in suffering***. The apostles tasted it here in Acts 5. No doubt the beating left them bruised and bleeding, with wounds that took weeks to heal. But they were able to rejoice in the pain because it reminded them of what Jesus had suffered for them.

As blows fell upon them, ***they remembered the blows that had fallen on Jesus***. And that fellowship with Jesus gave them strength to persevere.

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Perseverance** in preaching the Gospel

“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” Acts 5:42

***Every day*** the apostles kept preaching. The believers went door to door. Their mission was to be sure that every man, woman and child in all of Jerusalem had opportunities to hear about the risen Jesus. And that is our mission as well - to see the whole region saturated with the Gospel!

**4 Keys to Gospel Saturation**

1. Our **Perseverance** in preaching the Gospel

“***You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching***, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” Acts 5:28

May accusations like this be leveled against us! “You have filled Tampa Bay with your teaching!” May we be regularly charged with trying to “bring the blood of Jesus upon people.” That is precisely our agenda - to lead people to joyfully take the blood of Jesus upon themselves!

***Charles Simeon*** served as the pastor of a church in Cambridge, England, for 54 years, from 1783 until his death in 1836 at the age of 77. For the first twelve years of his ministry there the congregation made it clear they did not want him, as the “pewholders” who paid for their seats refused to attend or allow others to use their pews. So Simeon’s only audience came from those willing to stand in the aisles and in the back. And this went on - not for 12 weeks or 12 months but for 12 YEARS.

***Simeon chose to never marry.*** He felt called to serve the Lord and the church without the distractions of a family. This makes his endurance all the more remarkable and shows how he became an example for John Stott who served for 30 years, unmarried, in London.

Simeon also ***battled chronic and severe depression.*** For different stretches of time he lived with John Newton, who supported and encouraged him through these seasons of darkness.

So ***how did Charles Simeon persevere*** for 54 years in a difficult ministry and in the face of deep internal struggles? Like the apostles in Acts 5, his desire was to fill the streets of Cambridge with the gospel of Jesus Christ. His determination, especially for those who opposed him, was to bring the blood of Jesus upon their heads. And many who at first stood against him did, in time, come around to support him as the grace of Jesus softened their hearts and drew them back to involvement in the church.

Brothers and sisters, may this be true of us! ***May we remain determined to fill the city with the teaching of Jesus!*** May we pray and work to see this vision fulfilled - that every man, woman and child in our whole region will have opportunities to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. That the glory of the Lord will fill Tampa Bay as the waters fill the sea!

Let’s pray