

Roy's Sermon for 3/1/2021

Acts 5:11-25 'A Walk Through Peter's Life with Jesus: Standing Your Ground In Jesus' Name!'

A few weeks ago in our journey through Peter's life with Jesus, we looked at Acts 4:23-31 in a sermon entitled 'God Is Shaking The World'. We saw that after having been hauled before the Jewish ruling elite and being commanded and threatened "Not to speak further in Jesus' name", Peter and John were released. Acts 4 Verse 23 "going back to their own people": being Jews in the centre of the Jewish universe, (Jerusalem), that like Christians today in this world, they were aliens just passing through on their pilgrimage to their real home of heaven! Then after reporting those threats of violence (v24) "the brethren prayed. Sovereign Lord". In Greek the word used despota where we get the word despot from, describing an horrific human ruler. But an apt description of God! Yes despota. Lord you are Ruler and Creator of the whole universe. Lord, your authority is absolute. Unlimited and unimpeded.

Colossians 1:15-21 tells us that indeed in Jesus "all things are knit together". Yes Jesus not only created, but also sustains and holds the whole universe together! V25-28, a thousand years before, God's Spirit spoke through King David that "the nations conspire and rage against The Lord and his Anointed Son" Jesus. Just as they continue to do so in our own Nation Today! V29, the prayer is that God would "consider" That he would remember and not overlook those threats. But that He would in effect, bring down upon their own heads that enmity and hatred which the Jewish elite revelled in!

V31: "After they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken". I suggested that in this there is great symbolism for us because in the same way that the room was shaken, God would and is shaking the world with Christ's gospel. He shakes each person's world when He comes to them through Jesus, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. And He is shaking the whole world in preparation, for the coming, and the judgement of the King!!

And so to this morning's text: 'A Walk Through Peter's Life With Jesus. An Ordinary Man Serving An Extraordinary God. Acts 5:12-25 Standing Your Ground In Jesus' Name: The Apostles' Second Defence!'

In Acts 5:11 we read "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events". Verses 1-11 record the deaths of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. But I'm not going to touch upon those things today. What I would like to do is briefly look at this "great fear" which seized the whole church because it is very clear that today, such an attitude toward God by His people, is almost non-existent!

But the question which must be asked is Why is this so? If God hasn't changed, then why has the attitude and approach of His people changed so much? It is interesting that many Christians today, look back on more formal times, (for one of the better description), with almost a contempt. Perhaps they think We know God better now. Or may even profess in some way or other. I've even heard people say things like, 'O you are stuck in the Old Testament'. As if the New Testament God and the Old Testament God are not the same God. As I've mentioned before, the Old Testament God is the scary God of vengeance and judgement and the New Testament God is of course all about love. But this is not so! Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever." No, God hasn't changed Beloved. But it does seem that our perception of Him has changed. It is as if we

believe that God has softened somewhat. And that He will accept things from us today which were unacceptable to Him in the past. But this is a wicked, even an ungodly familiarity which has taken hold of the church. And it is rooted in the sense of One's own self importance. We think that somehow God needs us, perhaps he would even be lost without us. But no. The Bible says "humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up," and that "Our God is a consuming fire", and "His eyes were like blazing fire", and finally "take off your sandals for the place you are standing is holy ground". In the same way, as we saw some weeks ago in 2 Timothy 4 Paul writes to his son in the faith as he is about to die, "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living in the dead."

I wonder, do you ever feel that way? Do you ever feel that need to take off your sandals. Do you ever feel that you are in the presence of God? Ananias and Sapphira felt the hand of God upon them for judgement literally, as their very lives passed away, because of their contempt of Him who sees and knows all. I wonder how many of us are guilty of those same things in our great age of familiarity? In verse 12 miracles abounded. They continued to meet together in the temple courts and verse 13 tells us "no one else dared join them even though they were highly regarded by the people", and yet verse 14 tells us "nevertheless, more and more men and women were added to their number."

So what do we make of these two verses? Do we even have contradiction here? No. The commentator explains that, in a sense, it relates to what I mentioned earlier. Because for the believers in those days Christianity, (being named as a follower of Jesus), was a serious matter. In many ways it was a life and death decision. Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 16:24-27 "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what would it profit a man were he to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul? And what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For I tell you the truth, the Son of man is going to come in his father's glory with his holy angels and he will reward each person according to what he has done".

Now to take up one's cross was no joke, because you knew that you were not coming back. Perhaps they could have put up a sign in Solomon's colonnade where they used to meet 'Serious applicants only need apply'. You see, there was no room for half-heartedness because there was too much at stake for all concerned, even eternally so! The apostles were warned and threatened over and over and over again not to teach in Jesus' Name. And yet in the face of it all, in Jesus, their zeal and courage increased all the more. Not that those threats of violent consequences were not real, it's just that they concluded that their time in this world was not long. And indeed if God wills, it may well be cut short at the hands of Jesus' enemies. So if that be the case, then they were not going to waste their days. They would preach Christ, while time and breath they yet had left!

You know, so often when I read of the lives of the people of the Bible, (and of the lives of the followers of Jesus down through the ages), I think to myself, am I even a Christian at all? Satan does attack me within the realities of my inconsistencies. My hot and cold walk with Jesus. Perhaps that's how it is for you at times dear friends. But I am reassured as I read the scriptures, that though God know me better than I know myself, because of Jesus, He calls me His own. Because as the saying goes, not perfect just forgiven. As John said last week, perhaps it would be suitable as we enter into the place of worship that we hang a sign declaring 'perfect people need not apply'.

In v15-16 there is an extraordinary account of miracles abounding. Yes, "the fear of the Lord" had gripped the people. Righteousness is the result, with the church growing. The people with their needs come, and to establish the apostle's ministry, miracles and deliverances abound! Now you

would think that when such things occur amongst those who claim the name of God, there would be great rejoicing and praising of Him by all, but no. That is not the case at all as we have seen throughout this series. 2 Timothy 3:12-13: "in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. While evil men and imposters go from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived". 'That's just how it is,' Paul tells Timothy in his farewell letter to his son in the faith. 'You will not be walking on an easy road. It's the good road, it's the straight and narrow road, and it is the only road if you are genuinely for Jesus and seeking to go to heaven, but it's not an easy road. Trials and hardships lay ahead my son because' "in fact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted".

Of course Paul knew a bit about this persecution. Having been a murderer of Christ's Church. And also one who had almost tasted death many times for Jesus' Name. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 we read, "I've worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and day in the open sea, I've been constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers. I've laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep, I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food, I've been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressures of my concern for all the churches".

So when the Church of Jesus grows, we cannot expect that there will be an overflowing of joy from the world and even from the supposed recognised Church of the day. Actually, often the opposite is true. This is described in Acts 4:26 "the nations and the authorities continue to conspire and rage against God and his Anointed One" Jesus Christ through His church!

Acts 5:17. "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy". Friends, what does the 10th commandment say? "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house or his wife or his manservant or his maid servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour". Paul in Colossians 3:5 says "put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and covetousness which is idolatry." Brothers and sisters, how clear it is that a jealous, covetous heart, is an evil thing straight from the pits of hell? It is the seed of idolatry. It is to desire and in effect worship something within our hearts, which is not God. And it begets evil.

Look, here is this abounding of the miraculous from God, and yet what is the response of the religious elite? Praise be to the Almighty? Blessed be the Lord? No. Jealousy. Evil Idolatrous envy! I said some weeks ago that there is a deep seeded, evil, irrational hatred by the unsaved world, (and indeed even from those who are falsely under the banner of Christ), toward everyone who claims Jesus as Lord. And this shouldn't surprise us because as we have been seeing, David wrote over 3000 years ago in Psalm 2: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The Kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed One". To different degrees of expression, this is the bent of spirit which is inherent within the hearts of everyone who denies the existence of The Almighty, and has rebelled against that One and Only Truly living God. This is clearly what we have here before us in our passage today!

In verse 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public gaol. Now Matthew Henry explains that this was not simply some type of overnight holding cell no. But where the real hardcore criminals and dirtbags were put. The murderers, the insurrectionists, the rapists. Again can you see?

That this was the vehemence, the hatred and the scorn with which Christianity was and continues to be attacked. But the greater attack, the greater the abuse, the greater the persecution, then the greater the work, the power and the deliverance of God!

Verse 19 “but during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the gaol and brought them out. So friends, humanly speaking what would be the thing to do now? Imagine you've been put in prison for doing something, there is a great threat hanging over your head, (perhaps even your very life is hanging in the balance), the thing to do now is to get yourself out of there and hide out somewhere until the danger has passed, right? Well, scripture says that “man proposes but God disposes” (Proverbs 19:21 Living Bible) and also “but your ways are not my ways”, says the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8). Look at what the men are instructed to do. It is totally counter intuitive to self-preservation. Verse 20 “go stand in the temple courts”, he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life”. Not go and hide, but “go and stand.” Yes, “stand” tall for all to see.

Can you imagine? The sword of Damocles is hanging over your head; you've already escaped the gallows and then you are told to go and do the very thing for which you came before that hanging judge in the first place. Surely in your mind you must be thinking, that this is not the best plan. Perhaps there is another way! Brothers and sisters, oftentimes that is what our minds do, isn't it? The Spirit of God might prod us to speak to this person or that person. Or to put our hand up for some task or some form of ministry, but then our old nature, (listening to the whispers of Satan), says, I don't have the right words. I'm not well enough equipped. Or I'll do it later. Or, there are others who are far more qualified than me. But the problems with these excuses are that firstly, they leave no room for the power of God to work through us and our weaknesses and secondly, they rob us of the blessing of honouring and serving Him.

Beloved, Satan wants us to take a backward step. To get comfortable, to get cosy and leave it to someone else. But the question which must be asked: Is that what Jesus did for our sakes? And is that what the apostles did here? No. Look at their response. “At daybreak”, At the crack of dawn, At the first rays of the sun's light “They entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people”. Yes this was all out in the open for all to see. “Standing in the temple courts,” not undercover. Not skulking around in the shadows. Not concealing who they were but standing. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 6:13: “Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you've done everything, to stand”. He speaks of a preparedness. Being aware that trouble is coming. Prepared, as a well-trained soldier for battle. We are to face the enemies of Jesus front on! For us in our comfy western society this might feel foreign to us or even farfetched, but it shouldn't. As I've said many times, all that we hold dear to in Christ is being attacked today, be not mistaken. More and more in Australia today to lay a bold and overt claim to the Name of Jesus brings with it an open contempt, hostility and even legal ramifications. Yes, “in fact everyone who wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”

Yes friends, the nations continue to “conspire and rage” against Jesus and His church. No, they can't get to Him physically, so they will get to Him through His church. But beloved, come what may the true people of God will always declare His truth. And notice what it is that they were commanded to proclaim: Verse 20 “the full message of this new life” To the rich young ruler Jesus said “I tell you the truth, lest you be born again you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven”. Becoming a Christian we enter into a “new life” because we are new people, called to serve and be obedient to our new King, Jesus!

In verse 19 we learn that “the angel opened the doors” and yet in verse 23 the guards have not moved and the physical doors have remained shut. So although that realm in which the angels work

is hidden from us, it is real. And is effected in our physical world. The apostles were not symbolically released, they were physically, literally released to preach and teach God's Word! This is the lot of the believer brothers and sisters, that is why we are here, to make the Name of our Saviour known. And in His Name to play our role in seeking for and saving the lost, as John preached last week!

In verse 23-24 the officers who were sent to get the men are dumbfounded by the scene which confronted them. They were troubled, they "were puzzled". It didn't make sense to them . The doors were shut and the guards were there, and yet the prisoners were nowhere to be found.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'm often "puzzled" by the way God works. I think I know what He is doing but most of the time I'm wrong. And yet I take comfort in knowing that all that He does is for the benefit and blessing of His people. He raises up His servants to bring glory to His Name. And the way that they do this is to stand in the face of all opposition, in the face of all ridicule, and even in the face of all that seems to make sense to us. And is contrary to all of the wisdom of the world! We stand, and declare who we are in Christ. Verse 25 "then someone came and said, "Look, the men you put in gaol are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people".

Brethren, be not mistaken, they were placing their lives in God's hands! Beloved, we too are called by God to Stand. Be not deceived dear friends, if our eyes are open to the age in which we live, we must acknowledge that for the true follower of Jesus in Australia today, the times are increasingly dark. To seek to bring the light and the truth of God's Word into the evil of so much of that which is afoot in this wonderful land in which we live today, brings with it the contempt, the ridicule, the rejection and ultimately the persecution of this world. And yet even so, like Peter and John we stand. Yes we stand to give an account for the great hope which we have in Jesus! Yes, "put on the full armour of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand"!

Let's Pray.