

Text: Acts 5:17-42

Title: “Unstoppable Witnesses” Pt.1

I want you to see this morning that we are a small part of something amazingly huge. We are a humble part of a movement that cannot fail ... a movement that is marching along through history, impacting people in nations all over the world, and that will one day fill the whole universe as the Kingdom of God. You see, two thousand years ago Jesus said...

Matthew 16:18b – I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

It's His church. And the gates of hell will not be able to withstand it. We're unstoppable! But in spite of what Jesus said, the fact is that we often think we're losing the battle, don't we. Let's be honest. We see evil triumphing and godlessness expanding, and we think we're part of something that is failing.

ILLUSTRATION - In 2012 Dan Meyer wrote a book entitled *Witness Essentials*. In his book Meyers gives some encouraging statistics about the growth of the church around the world:

- In 1900 Korea had no Protestant church. Today, there are over 7,000 churches just in the city of Seoul, South Korea.
- 100 years ago the southern part of Africa was only 3% Christian. Today 63 % of the population is Christian. Church membership in Africa is growing by 34,000 people every day.
- In India there are 140 million members of the so-called "untouchable" caste, but 14 million now profess faith in Christ.
- More people in the Islamic world have come to Christ in the last 25 years than in the entire history of Christian missions.
- In China, it is estimated that there are now more disciples of Jesus than there are members of the Communist party. China will soon have more Christians than any country in the world.
- Across the planet, followers of Jesus are increasing by more than 80,000 each day; 510 new churches form every day.

Jesus said it would happen. This is His church and the gates of hell will not be able to withstand our march forward. Sure there are places in the world where this isn't happening, but the Gospel is being proclaimed in places where it has never reached before, and when the Gospel is proclaimed people will be saved.

The book of Acts is the story of how it all started ... a group of men and women who discovered what it means to be, “Unstoppable ... Living in the Irrepressible Power of the Spirit.” There's a single-sentence summary and outline of Acts 1:8 where Jesus said...

Acts 1:8 - But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The Gospel *will* be taken to the ends of the earth by followers of Jesus. And they will do it in the power of the Holy Spirit, which will make us unstoppable. Open your Bibles to Acts 5:17. I've never felt that we were more on target than we are today as we are focusing on REVIVAL PRAYING and GOSPEL SATURATION. We have focused on our church becoming a HOUSE OF

PRAYER, and now we are focusing on our families becoming HOMES OF PRAYER with our 7-5-2 focus. And the power we gain through prayer is for the purpose of our being contagious witnesses for Christ. This weekend our ladies experienced a real movement of the Lord among them. The week after next is one of the great outreach opportunities we have in our Sportsman's Dinner. The Gospel will be shared in clear way. Men, will you have someone there that needs Christ?

While we are part of something unstoppable, it never has been nor will it ever be easy. That's what we see in this episode in Acts 5. This is a lengthy passage and I want to sort of fly over it one time to show you just how unstoppable this work of God is, then I want to come back at the end and land on a few words of encouragement for us. What we have here is a second wave of persecution that is unleashed on the church by the religious authorities in Jerusalem. In the first wave Peter and John were arrested, then released and told not to preach the Gospel anymore. Obviously they would not be stopped by that prohibition. They prayed, were freshly filled with the Holy Spirit, and back out on the streets they were speaking the Word of God with boldness.

Acts 5:17 - Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.

Acts 5:18 - They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

We're *not* unstoppable BECAUSE WE HAVE POLITICAL POWER. We must not think that the only way we will prevail is to make sure that we have people in political power on our side. The apostles found themselves on the wrong side of the prevailing "party." But they were still unstoppable.

Acts 5:19 - But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.

They were unstoppable BECAUSE THEY HAD DIVINE ASSISTANCE. An angel intervenes to miraculously get them out of jail. By the way, this is one of three instances in Acts where prisons couldn't hold God's messengers. Prison doors miraculously flew wide open. It's like Luke wants us to remember that no earthly jail can arrest the Gospel.

Acts 5:20 - "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

This is the main point of everything the church is doing in Acts, and what we are to be about. We are to go, stand and tell the full message of this new life (the Gospel). And that's what they did. They didn't go into hiding. Instead...

Acts 5:21a - At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

They were unstoppable BECAUSE THEY HAD A CLEAR COMMAND from the angel who represented God Himself. I think we would be more bold and intentional in our witness if we had heard that clearly from God ... go, stand, tell.

By the way, next Sunday we have a great experience planned where we are going to show you a way to tell this message to your family and friends.

Well the next few verses explain how the religious authorities gathered to decide what they were going to do with these menaces who keep preaching the Gospel. They sent officers to retrieve the prisoners from the jail only to find that their jail cell was empty ... doors still locked but empty. As they are standing there scratching their heads someone said, "Hey the guys you put in jail are out there at it again teaching the people." So the soldiers grabbed the apostles and brought them to be questioned by the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish leaders.

Acts 5:28 - "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."

Ah, that's exactly what Jesus said would happen when the Spirit came upon these ordinary people ... they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem! But there's another explanation for the unstoppable nature of their witness. **THEY WERE WITNESSES OF AN UNSTOPPABLE SAVIOR.**

Acts 5:29 - Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

Acts 5:30 - The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.

The Savior we are talking about is unstoppable. The Roman authorities and the Jewish leaders thought they could stop Jesus by executing Him, but they failed. God raised Him from the dead. More than that...

Acts 5:31 - God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Jesus has been exalted and will be exalted. Every knee will bow. That means your knee. That means Lady Gaga's knees. That means the knees of every ISIS leader. That means you and I will either bow before Jesus as our Savior or we will bow before Him as our Judge. Which will it be for you?

Acts 5:32 - We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Now here's another reason they were unstoppable. **THEY WERE FILLED WITH THE UNSTOPPABLE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** You see this is what makes people risk their jobs, their reputations, even their very lives. They could obey God and not men because they had been given the Holy Spirit.

Well this made the religious authorities so angry they wanted to kill them. But cooler heads prevailed.

Acts 5:34 - 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.

Acts 5:35 - Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.

Gamaliel was the most respected Jewish teacher of the day. He had a kind of seminary where he trained other men who wanted to be rabbis. Because he was so respected, everyone listened to his reasoning. In vv.36-37 Gamaliel reminds them of other insurrectionists who rose up and gained a following, but were killed and it all came to nothing. So in light of that...

Acts 5:38 - Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.

Acts 5:39 - But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

Gamaliel may not have really wanted God’s purpose to be fulfilled in these preachers of the Gospel, but what he said is true. If this is of God it will not be stopped, so don’t be in place where you are fighting against God.

In fact, one of Gamaliel’s top students may have been in the room that day ... a fiercely zealous man named Saul of Tarsus. We’ll see later in Acts how he thought he could stop this movement by dragging believers into court. But the man who arrested believers was himself arrested one day by Jesus on the road to Damascus. He discovered first hand you can’t fight against God and win. And he became part of this unstoppable movement.

So here is another reason these people were such unstoppable witnesses. **THEY WERE PART OF THE UNSTOPPABLE PURPOSES OF GOD.** Church, we are on the winning side. Not everybody we witness to will be saved. That’s God’s business, not ours. But God’s kingdom will come one day. And His kingdom will be populated with hundreds of millions of people who have put their trust in Jesus and come to eternal life. As witnesses for Jesus Christ we are part of God’s great unstoppable, eternal purpose.

Acts 5:40 - 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.

Acts 5:41 - The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

So these men are beaten and ordered not to speak in name of Jesus but ...

Acts 5:42 - 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.

Unstoppable witnesses!

Question: What would you attempt if you knew you couldn't fail? What would you sacrifice if you knew it was for a winning cause? How would you live every day if you knew that you were part of something that was unstoppable? Here's what it did for the people in Acts. It allowed them to...

1. COURAGEOUSLY OBEY

Acts 5:29b - "We must obey God rather than men!"

We don't fear what people say or do to us. Our God is Lord, and one day everyone will know it.

2. CONFIDENTLY PERSEVERE

Acts 5:39 - if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men...

Sometimes we want to quit because we see evil winning all around us. But we belong to God and His purposes cannot fail.

3. JOYFULLY ENDURE

Acts 5:41 - The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Why? Because that Name is the name that is above every name, the Bible says. And one day, at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God.