

**8/23/15**

**Acts 5:12-16**

## **Strange Church**

*12 Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

These are strange days we live in. And they are even stranger if you believe in the crucified, resurrected Jesus. It's strange to live in this world right now, as God's church.

If you hold true to what the Bible says, it automatically puts you in a quandary, because if you *believe* it, you *live* it, and if you *live* it, you are *exposed*. Jobs are lost, promotions don't come, you don't get elected, you don't make the team, friends leave, and you don't get to advance because you believe this and live it and you are exposed. In general, if you believe in this book and you live this book, your life is not getting increasingly easy, your life is getting increasingly more difficult. It can sometimes be hard because your beliefs that translate into your life make you seem weird; because to the rotting world around you, how you live is weird, especially those of you who came to Christ later in your life. People remember how you *were* and they see how you *are* now and to them it's weird.

But it's been that way from the beginning. We've always been called sojourners and exiles, people who don't really fit into the decaying world around us. Turns out that the church in the book of Acts is no different.

By Acts Chapter 5, the church is functioning, people are gathering together, they meet on the Lord's day, they come together weekly to worship and the surrounding community just doesn't get it. By verses 12-16, the presence of God is on the church to such a degree that a married couple --Ananias and Sapphira-- have suddenly died because of greed and hypocrisy, and it has rattled everybody. Verse 11 says, "*Great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things,*" and rightly so. Just as an aside, could it be that a church is not more powerful because it doesn't take sin seriously? Well this church, God's church, did. The power of God was present and people's lives were changed. Isn't that what we *really* want? More than our own personal preferences and petty desires? Don't we want God? This passage gives us a picture of what God's church looks like and what it does, how it lives and grows. So why don't we put down all of our notions of what *ought* to be done and take a look and see what it is that God *does*. The truth is...

## God's Church Changes Lives

Let's talk about how.

### God's Church is a Fearless Church

Let me show you where I get this. You have to read Verse 12 and it's there at the end. *"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico."* They were all together in Solomon's Portico. Solomon's Colonnade or Portico was one of the two great colonnades that surrounded the temple area. Solomon's Portico is where Jesus said in John 10:27-28, *"My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* Solomon's Portico is where Peter preached in Acts 3, calling Jesus the Holy and Righteous One. It's there in Acts 3:12. Peter said, *"There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

At Solomon's Portico, the church gathered in broad daylight for the world to hear and see who they were and what they believed and why they did so. And they were hated and shamed and persecuted for it. Why would we think that we should be treated any differently? Remember what Jesus said in John 15:20, *"A servant is not greater than his master, and if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* It's our calling and lot to take up the cross and follow, to go out as sheep among wolves.

The young church in Acts 5 met where everyone could see them. They knew the price of discipleship and were willing to pay it. They were constant in their attendance and convicted in their living. Worship for them was not entertainment or consumer-driven. Worship was *life*.

I think hard days are ahead for Christian people. I thank God for the struggle ahead because a faith that can't be tested is a faith that can't be trusted. So why don't we put down all our worldly pretensions and petty expectations? As in Hebrews 13:13-14, *"therefore let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."* So what if you don't make the team or lose your job or your house or even your life? We live for the One who holds our lives in His hand. It's the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That church changes lives. God's church is a fearless church.

### God's Church is a Solid Church

Notice in Verse 12 *"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico."* Apostles, the 12 who have been with Jesus from His baptism to His resurrection. The signs and wonders mentioned in Verse 12 were God's way of authenticating the church's ministry, as a precursor to the written word of God – the Bible. And in Ephesians 2:20, Paul will say the church is *"Built on a foundation of the apostles and the prophets,*

*Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."* The church is effective because it is *solid*, not because it is *spectacular*.

God's church doesn't sacrifice doctrine for popularity and doesn't compromise truth for bigger crowds. Part of our task in this new Pre-Christian America is to shake off the consumer-driven approach designed for church-hoppers and sermon-tasters. We lash ourselves to the mast of "the faith once and for all delivered to the saints" and find out what it is we *really* care about. If it is fog machines and self-help, then the church won't stand. If Christ is going to be exalted and His disciples are going to be made, we must keep building a solid foundation.

In Timothy 3:15, Paul calls the church the household of God, the church of the Living God, the pillar and the buttress of the truth. He doesn't call the church "exciting" or tell Timothy to "make sure there's not a quality gap." He doesn't add a "wow" factor because, let me promise, when the inferno of the world comes and tragedy creates a "scorched earth" across your life, you won't be looking for a "wow" factor. You need a sovereign Savior, a Good Shepherd, a loving Father, a hiding place. You need to be able to say with the Psalmist in Psalm 121:1 "*I lift my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made the Heaven and Earth.*" You can't say that if your life is not hidden in Christ, if your hopes are not founded on the rock that is Christ. You need something solid.

God's Church is Fearless; God's Church is Solid.

### **God's Church is a Peculiar Church**

Look at this description in verses 11,12,13,& 14, particularly verses 13 & 14. "*And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things. Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,*"

Do you see the paradox, the oxymoron, the two-sidedness of the Spirit's power in the church? The presence of God *attracts* and *repels* at the same time. The same Holy Spirit that heals and draws people to Christ also judges sin and demands commitment. "*None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,*" The presence of God is alarming to some and appealing to others. Some are frightened away and some drawn to faith.

But notice the church didn't grow by compromising its message or muffling its convictions. In fact, this chapter starts with two people in the church being *struck dead!* It should teach us that the thing we need in the church is that which we can't manufacture. It's the presence of God. Jesus said in John 12:32, "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself.*" That's where we must hang our hat.

Our going through Acts in 2015 and 2016 is intentional, because Acts is the story of the church flourishing in a pagan society. The moral revolution we are in has landed us in a world not that dissimilar from the church in Acts. In order for us to survive and thrive in the coming dystopia, we move away from attracting people with bait and then trying to gig them with the Gospel. Instead, we raise the cross high for the all world to see and we plant that cross in the wasteland of people's lives and we stand clear on our mission.

Ours is a mission to see people's lives changed by the Gospel. Isn't that what God's church is supposed to do, change lives? To do so, we must be *fearless* church, a *solid* church and a *peculiar* church, a church that comes out of hiding and says with the apostle Paul in Romans 1:16: *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the Power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."*

A Gospel that tells me that God is Holy, created you in His image. Your sin has separate you from God. Jesus Christ came and lived a perfect life you cannot live, dies on the cross in place of sinner and any sinner that believes, regardless of who you are, any sinner who believes, the Bible says you can be saved. You can be a part of the family of God. You can be a member in the church. You can have community. a life that is held in the hand of God and an eternity that is spent in the presence of God. God's church is a church that sees change in peoples lives. That change happens with the Gospel.

*(Pastor Prays)*