

Unstoppable (Pt. 1)

(Acts 5:17-32)

Introduction

1. Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, and wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. In the face of opposition, how to experience the unstoppable life of Jesus in us & through us.
 - a. Following Jesus doesn't mean we'll always be comfortable/secure in this life (cf. 1 Pet 4:12-14).
 - b. Like in exercise, there is no growth without resistance.
3. Background:
 - a. [Acts 5:12-16] Jesus' followers pray & preach the gospel, accompanied by signs & wonders.
 - b. There is a growing delineation between those who are simply fans, and those who are genuine followers.

Opposition is an opportunity to experience God's power [Acts 5:17-19]

1. [17] Sadducees are jealous of the apostles' expanding influence & bitter about their direct disobedience (cf. 4:17-18).
 - a. Sadducees: Another sect of Judaism (like Pharisees).
 - b. Privileged aristocracy: They are rich & powerful
 - i. The High Priest comes from their line, meaning they control the Temple and its taxes.
 - ii. They compromise with the Roman government to protect their economic & political interests.
 - c. Theology:
 - i. Most accept only the Pentateuch as Scriptures.
 - ii. They believe the spirit dies with the physical body (no resurrection), leading to a materialistic outlook.
 - d. They are jealous of the apostles' expanding influence & popularity.
2. [18] Like Ch. 4, those who preach & teach about Jesus are imprisoned to curtail their message's influence.
 - a. The disciples faced obstacles/opposition from within (Acts 5:1-11) and without (Acts 5:17-18).
 - i. Reality: As Christians faithfully follow Jesus, we run into obstacles & suffering.
 - ii. If there is no opposition in your life for the sake of Christ, perhaps you're not really following Jesus.
 - b. It would be easy for the disciples to be discouraged by this seemingly immovable opposition.
3. [19] God sends an angelic being to set them free.
 - a. God's divine power & sovereign will overrule human authority & circumstances.
 - b. Jesus can & does set people free from captivity/suffering in this life, but also promises His followers will suffer for His sake, yet be blessed in that (cf. John 15:18-21; 16:33).
 - i. Some don't experience the power of God because we never take risks, sacrifice or suffer for Jesus.
 - ii. If you must choose between pain-free existence now or following Jesus, choose the latter.
 - iii. At His return & the resurrection of the dead, Jesus will fully deliver all His children (cf. Rev 21:4).
 - c. God turns this obstacle into an opportunity to experience His power.
 - i. We need to remind each other of God's power in opposition by sharing our true stories together.
 - ii. Those in prisons (literal/situational) know what it's like to be desperate for hope & help, and what it's like to experience God's power & presence the most during such adversity/opposition.
4. Application: What obstacles/prisons are discouraging you, as you follow Jesus?
 - a. Don't be discouraged; Jesus has overcome the world (cf. John 16:33) & gives peace (John 14:27).
 - b. Trust Jesus as you follow/suffer for His sake; it becomes an opportunity to experience His power in real ways.

Opposition is an opportunity to share God's truth [Acts 5:20-25]

1. [20-21a] The apostles fearlessly obey God's instruction.
 - a. [20] The angel relays instructions: Go and stand in the Temple & speak about life in Christ to all the people.
 - i. "Words of this Life": About salvation & eternal life through Jesus (the Author of Life; cf. 3:15).
 - ii. Early Christians were referred to as followers of "the Way" or "the Life" (cf. Acts 9:2; John 14:6).
 - b. [21a] And as soon as they hear it, they do it.
2. [21b-25] The opposition's helplessness.
 - a. The supernatural jail break has gone unnoticed by the civic & religious leadership.
 - i. [21b] The Sanhedrin convene in Hall of Hewn Stones (building in the North wall of the Temple Mount)
 - ii. [22-23] Confused officers return & report the missing prisoners, despite the prison remaining secure.
 - iii. [24] Captain (#2 in the Temple) & Sadducees confounded about what has happened and what to do.
 - b. [25] An observant bystander points out the disciples "*standing* in the Temple & *teaching* the people."
 - i. The apostles act in direct, word-for-word obedience to God (cf. 5:20).
3. God turns opposition into opportunity to not only experience God's power in their lives, but through their lives.
 - a. Opposition is an opportunity to obey God & share God's truth to others.
 - b. The disciples can testify about their miraculous freedom as evidence of the truth about Jesus as God.
 - c. Big idea: Regardless of the obstacles, God's Kingdom & gospel are unstoppable.
 - d. Jesus' followers have the opportunity to play a part in the purpose-giving, life-transforming work of God.
4. Application: When we face a prison/opposition, it's tempting to get frustrated, discouraged, distracted from our mission
 - a. It's easy to focus our time, energy, attention & resources on the painful situation in front of us.
 - b. What if every roadblock is an opportunity for Jesus to show His power, to unleash you to tell His story through your story, to the glory of God & good of others?

Opposition is an opportunity to obey God [Acts 5:27-32]

1. [26-28] The opposition's desperation
 - a. [26] Captain & officers bring them in, but without their usual rough tactics, fearful of a riot.
 - b. [27-28] The High Priest reiterates they were commanded not to preach in Jesus' name (cf. 4:17-18).
 - i. The Sadducees do not want them to preach/teach about resurrection & eternal life through Jesus.
 - ii. The Sadducees do not want the accusation/guilt of having killed the Messiah-King, Son of God.
 - c. Despite all their political, socio-economic power, they are helpless in contending against Jesus & the gospel.
2. [29-32] Obey men or God?
 - a. [29] Peter unveils what's at stake: "We must obey God rather than men."
 - i. The central issue at stake in your life & mine: In opposition, are we going to obey God or people?
 - ii. Are we going to respond to difficulties the same way as society, media, those without Jesus dictate?
 - b. [30] They are obeying the one, true God of their collective fathers (including the Sadducees)
 - i. He's the same God who raised Jesus from the dead.
 - ii. They killed Jesus in the most Biblically-cursed/shameful way (cf. Deut 21:23), by crucifying on a tree.
 - c. [31] But the One they rejected & killed as low, God exalted high to His right hand:
 - i. [31a] As Leader who rules & reigns as God, because He's Lord.
 - ii. As the only hope & source for salvation, because He's Savior.
 - iii. [31b] Through Jesus as Lord & Savior, God offers all of us gifts of repentance & forgiveness of sin.
 - iv. Jesus lived the life you have not lived, died the death you should have died, and rose to give you the gift you cannot earn.
 - d. [32] All the disciples are simply witnesses testifying to the truth, alongside the Holy Spirit.
 - i. The Holy Spirit in us is God who has power to heal & teach through us (cf. John 15:26-27).
 - ii. God gifted the Holy Spirit to us because as they "obey Him."

Fan or Follower?

1. Illustration: Football fan
 - a. What is a follower vs "fan"? One who's followed the team since it's early heyday? Or during its bad seasons?
 - b. A true follower isn't in the stands, but gets on the field in the trenches, following the quarterback's directions.
 - c. A true follower is proven by standing in the face of risk, sacrifice, even suffering while following the quarterback's lead.

- d. Jesus fan: Enthusiastic admirer whose close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires any sacrifice.
- e. Jesus follower: Like the apostles, willing to follow & obey Jesus, trust in Him & the power of His gospel, even when things get tough (opposition, obstacles, difficulties in life).

2. Application: Are you a fan or a follower of Jesus?

- a. When it's hard, do you obey men or God in laying down your values, priorities, even your life to follow Jesus?
- b. When it's hard, do you obey Jesus to love your neighbor, whatever their color or socio-economic background, social skills, in loving your spouse or family?
- c. When it's hard, do you obey Jesus in telling/showing people good news about Him?
- d. Do you obey what people, circumstances or society tell you to do in difficulties, or God?
- e. Is comfort/security lord, or is Jesus?

3. [32] We can't obey God by our own willpower/strength, but the Holy Spirit makes us able.

- a. Our God is mighty, His kingdom/gospel an unstoppable force.
- b. What if pain/difficulties/opposition could count for something? What if they could be used to experience God's power in our own lives, to share God's truth about Jesus through our lives, & to move us to genuinely follow?