

Unstoppable (Pt. 2)

(Acts 5:33-42)

Introduction

1. Theme: Jesus accelerates us by the Holy Spirit to grow deeper through His family, wider in our impact for the gospel.
2. 4 types of suffering:
 - a. Common/general: Life in a sin-cursed, fallen world. Results: Sickness, creation in decay/disaster, death.
 - b. Specific: People bring pain on self/others as consequence of selfishness/foolishness; crime, war, etc.
 - c. Corrective: God disciplines His children out of love for the purpose of repentance & change (cf. Heb 12:5-6).
 - d. For Jesus' sake: Opposition that arises as we follow/obey Jesus.
 - i. How do we know if we're suffering because we're genuinely following Jesus' will?
 - ii. God's will: As led by the Holy Spirit (specific will) & confirmed through God's Word (general will).
 - iii. His will & Word are never contradictory.
3. In the face of opposition, we experience unstoppable life of Jesus & His Kingdom gospel in us & through us.
 - a. Background: [Acts 5:17-32] As we follow & serve Jesus, opposition is an opportunity to experience God's power, to share God's truth, & to be empowered to obey God.
 - b. Do you obey men or God? Are you a fan or a follower?
 - c. Today: Theological truth about why we can trust God in opposition, & how we should respond to it.

Opposition is an opportunity to trust God's sovereignty [Acts 5:33-39]

1. [33-34] God nudges reason to prevail.
 - a. [33] Instead of being convicted & repentant, the Sanhedrin are enraged & want to kill the apostles.
 - b. [34a] God uses a Pharisee to calm them down.
 - c. The Sanhedrin majority are Sadducees, the minority Pharisees
 - i. Sadducees: Do not believe in resurrection or an eternal soul; they only subscribe to the Pentateuch (ignoring God's work/will through the Prophets).
 - ii. Pharisees: Believe in resurrection & God's sovereign work; they hold man-made religious rules/traditions in addition to God's Word/commands.
 - iii. Pharisees are theologically conservative, Sadducees theological liberal; neither see Jesus as the fulfillment of God's Word & plan, despite the evidence of Jesus' life/death/resurrection, & miraculous work through the apostles.
 - d. [34b] Gamaliel: Part of the Pharisaic minority, but has considerable influence.
 - i. Well respected by the people (even the Sadducees) as a wise teacher of God's Law.
 - ii. Schooled Saul/Paul to receive impeccable training/honor as a Pharisee (cf. Acts 22:3).
 - iii. He stands & orders the prisoners to be sent out while they discuss.
2. [35-39] God's sovereignty overrules the plans of men
 - a. [35] Gamaliel warns the Sanhedrin to have a measured response rather than rash emotional reaction.
 - b. He cites 2 historical precedents to guide their response:
 - i. [36] Theudas' insurgency: Large following; he was killed; followers dispersed; it came to nothing.
 - ii. [37] Judas the Galilean's tax revolt: Likewise killed; followers scattered.
 - c. [38-39] His point: The same thing will happen to Jesus' followers.
 - i. [38] If it's simply men's plans, it's doomed to fail (as evidenced by historical precedents)
 - ii. [39] If it's God's plans (as Peter claims; cf. 5:29), it will be unstoppable because God is sovereign.
 - d. [39b] Both the Sadducees & Pharisees agree, against their perceived common adversary, in Jesus.
3. They get the theology right, but the conclusion wrong.
 - a. False supposition: Jesus is just a man, another false revolutionary/Messiah/leader/savior like the other two.

- i. He died, and His movement will disperse, like the other two.
 - b. Truth: He didn't stay dead, but was raised & seated at His Father's right hand as Leader & Savior (cf. 5:31).
 - i. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's Word & plan for a Messiah & Savior.
 - ii. Verifying evidence in His sinless life, atoning death, resurrection, & miracles/preaching of followers.
 - c. Truth: History testifies that Jesus' unstoppable Kingdom advances from Jerusalem to Judea/Samaria to the ends of the earth as a worldwide influence of good news, hope & grace, which is the Church today.
 - d. Jesus' disciples had not experienced that yet, but (agreeing with Gamaliel) trust in God's sovereignty.
 - i. They trust Jesus is in control, has led them this far, through so much, and won't abandon them now.
4. As we follow Jesus, opposition is an opportunity to unveil God's sovereignty.
- a. Sovereign: He is King; He rules & reigns from Heaven; He has authority over all (including your situation).
 - i. None of the circumstances are a surprise, too big for Him, or beyond His control; He's still in charge.
 - b. Be aware that opposition isn't simply people/circumstances; there is a spiritual enemy at work (cf. Eph 6:12).
 - i. They hate you because God loves you; they do whatever it takes to prevent you from following Jesus.
 - ii. Their methodology: Deception, division, distraction, discouragement, destruction.
 - c. Big Idea: Regardless of the opposition, God is bigger, His Kingdom & gospel message unstoppable.
 - i. We have the opportunity to play a part & experience His sovereignty as we follow in obedience.
 - d. Application: As you follow Jesus & experience opposition, do you trust He's sovereign & unstoppable?
 - i. Or, is your suffering because you are "found opposing God"?

Opposition is an opportunity to experience God's joy [Acts 5:40-42]

1. [40] The apostles are ushered back in, beaten, commanded not to speak in Jesus' name, & released.
 - a. "Beaten": Scourged on bare skin with a 3-tailed whip for 13 cycles.
 - i. Each cycle: 3 blows; 2 to the back, 1 to the chest; total of 39 blows.
 - ii. A legalistic interpretation of the Law for criminals: "No more than 40" (cf. Deut 25:3; 2 Cor 11:24).
 - iii. The loss of blood left people battered, weak, sometimes close to dead.
 - b. Goal: Intensify the punishment to deter "bad behavior."
 - c. The apostles face increasing opposition/suffering as they follow Jesus.
2. [42-42] How should we respond to obstacles/suffering as we follow Jesus?
 - a. [41] They pick themselves up, & leave rejoicing. Why?
 - b. They rejoice at being "counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" of Jesus.
 - i. Belief: It's not what men do against them; Jesus sovereignly allowed the privilege to suffer for Him.
 - ii. Jesus trusts them to represent Him; He declares them worthy (not by their own merit of what we can do, but what He can do in & through them).
 - iii. They get to experience in small part, the suffering Jesus experienced, & count it as honor.
 - c. [42] They believe this so much, every day (not just Sunday) & everywhere (not just at Church), they continue to disobey men & obey God, face more opposition/suffering, & unceasingly teach about Jesus (cf. 5:20, 25).
3. As they follow Jesus, God turns opposition into opportunity to experience God's deep, abiding, eternal joy. How?
 - a. It does not mean "pain is good" or "life is pain." For Christians, to follow/obey Jesus is more important than physical & emotional comfort.
 - b. Like Jesus (our model & the One who empowers us), we **look past suffering to the joy ahead** (cf. Heb 11:2).
 - c. As they follow/obey Jesus, they receive dishonor from men, but will receive honor from God.
 - i. Like Jesus who was shamed/cursed as low by men, but exalted high by His Father (cf. 5:30-31).
 - ii. They remember Jesus' promise of suffering for Him but being blessed & rejoicing (cf. Matt 5:10-12).
 - d. When you genuinely love someone because they love you so much (cf. Rom 5:8) & do so much for you, it is a joy & honor to sacrifice/suffer a little for them.

Conclusion

1. Jesus promises suffering for following Him (cf. John 15:18-21).
 - a. **The question isn't will you suffer, but how you suffer.**
 - b. Application: How will you face suffering for His sake?
 - i. Will you turn away from Jesus? Or rejoice in the Lord always (cf. Phil 4:4), even in suffering for Him?
 - c. Application: What if God can reframe suffering for Him as an opportunity to trust/depend on His sovereignty? Transform it to be a joy/honor to struggle & obey, to live for Jesus & like Jesus?
 - d. As you face opposition in life/ministry for Jesus, may you remember that our sovereign God is in control, experience Jesus to be mighty, His Kingdom/gospel unstoppable, & joy/honor in suffering for His sake.