

Message Summary

Jesus is the ultimate Life-Giver. Never is our need for life from Jesus clearer than when we consider the horror of human evil that results in death (Gn. 2:17; Rm. 6:23). Death comes to us for our own sin and, as we were reminded this past week at a high school in south Florida, from others' sin. We come to Jesus first because He offers us spiritual life and regeneration to save from the death and sin that enslaved us.

Jesus' primary agent on earth to extend the life-giving gospel of Christ is the church. Our series through Acts depicts this exemplary church as unified, sacrificial, and Spirit-filled. Further, it was opposed by Satan, who often used religious leaders as instruments for his opposition. Persecution came because they were active in speaking the life-giving gospel. In response, the apostles rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer dishonor for Christ's name (5:41).

How did the early church endure Satan's opposition with joy? They were anchored in the life-giving Word of truth. They also fought to preserve the unity of the church, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). They gathered regularly in large groups and small groups. They practically met the needs, spiritual and physical, of other saints. Still, Satan's work was present, as the story of Ananias and Sapphira reminds us. Though they were in fact generous, their goal in generosity was not love for the Lord or the saints. It was recognition. Having sold their field, they kept back some of the proceeds for themselves but pretended to give all of their proceeds to the church. They may have deceived the church, but they did not deceive the Holy Spirit, who knows our inner thoughts and motives. God's instantly lethal judgment reminds us of both the seriousness of our sin and the sacredness of Christ's work for us. Only by God's mercy, through Christ's sacrifice, are we spared the same quick end God's judgment wrought on them.

Persecution turned to imprisonment. Believers and unbelievers alike suffer, but Christianity gives meaning and purpose to our suffering (Rm. 5:3). Miraculously, the Lord brought the apostles out of prison while it was still locked and guarded. The first thing they did with their newfound freedom was continue to preach the gospel in the temple. They preached until Jerusalem and the whole surrounding area heard. Though our city and circumstances are different, Christ's call is the same: to lay down our own properties, interests, names, and lives to seeing the gospel advance, here in Gadsden and around the world.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Look at Col. 1:3-8. What kinds of gospel growth, mirrored in Acts 4:32-5:24, are depicted in this passage? What instruments does God use for them?

"When the enemy attacks to oppose Christ and the gospel, he tends to go after the leaders first." Why is this often Satan's strategy? What does it say to those who would aspire to Christian leadership? (See John 3:19-20).

Ananias and Sapphira's desire for self-glory through righteous deeds was not isolated. Jesus warns, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 6:1). Why is self-glory through outward deeds such an aberration from true righteousness that pleases God? Why is it such a temptation?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Are you spending time with the life-giving God?
2. Are you spending time with unbelievers who don't yet know the life-giving God? Do you long for them to know Christ?
3. Are you pursuing soul-level unity and fellowship with believers?
4. Are you depending on God's power, or your own strength, to walk as a life-giving church?
5. Do you embody a holy hatred for sin?
6. Are you given to jealousy and the consequent anger? Do you want glory and honor for yourself, or are you willing to do hard life-giving work without any recognition?
7. Are you willing to endure persecution and shame for the gospel's honor? Is your gospel witness clear and faithful enough to invite it?
8. Are you faithful to fellowship with the saints in both large groups (corporate worship gatherings) and small groups (house to house)? Are you generous with your time and funds to serve?
9. Barnabas was a nickname for "son of encouragement." Are you faithful to strengthen and encourage those around you? What sort of reputation do you bear?
10. Are you using your suffering for an opportunity for endurance and growth in character?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for providing Christ, our sacrificial substitute, to endure God's fatal wrath so that we could receive life.
 - Pray that our church would live for God's glory, not the glory or advance of our own names
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that the gospel would grant our community greater significance to their suffering than simply battling through pain: the kind of endurance that yields eternal rewards
 - Pray that, even as the gospel was preached in the entirety of Jerusalem, so now the gospel would be preached in the entirety of Gadsden and Etowah County. Pray that we would have the sacrifice and generosity to be part of God's work to preach it.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray for the Fairchilds as they continue language-training efforts in Mexico. Pray for grace to learn effectively as they grow spiritually, and pray for many outreach opportunities in their current context.
 - Pray for the IMB, as they expand efforts to reach the nations. Pray that many short-term, mid-term, and long-term missions would be advanced through their efforts to reach the nations with the gospel.