

Mission Possible: The Presence

Acts 5:12-42

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Please open your Bibles to Acts 5. In this series for June we are being reminded of our mission, which hasn't changed for 2,000 years. And we are learning some things from the early church in the book of Acts and how they began this mission which has been passed down over time from generation to generation until today. The baton is in our hands. We've reviewed the **purpose** of the mission: Go and make disciples- be my witnesses- we call it the Great Commission- and we are testing out a new way of articulating it... I hope you are getting it... **Our mission is hpftwbtG.** Which means... (*helping people find their way back to God*).

We've reviewed the **power** of the mission: Jesus told them to wait until the Holy Spirit came upon them and would fill them with power. Because Our mission is impossible without the power of the Holy Spirit filling us and changing us. We remembered that last week on Pentecost Sunday. God's Spirit in your life changes everything. Today we want to look deeper into this promise of God's presence in our lives and what it looks like.

Here is what Jesus promised at the end of the Great Commission...

Matthew 28:18-20

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

That's an amazing promise! But maybe you're like me... I believe that because I believe Jesus and I believe the Bible, but I want this to be more true and experienced in my life. I want his presence to be more felt, for God to show himself in ways that I know for certain, he is with me always. Do you want that?

Here's our **Big Idea: God's presence is promised for God's purpose.**

I said this last week... God gives his power to people who are serious about accomplishing his mission. This is why setting our compass and staying on course is so important. When we lose our way, when we forget the fundamentals of following Jesus in **obedience**, and when we stray from the mission... God doesn't stop loving us- but he doesn't have all of us, and so we are low on power, and his presence is not felt, and our impact on a watching world is minimized- no awe, no amazement, no power. No wonder people today feel "whatever" about God. We have a part to play in this... **Obedience** to God's purpose brings the promise of God's presence.

This is not an anti-grace proposition. God's grace is not... *"I get all the good things God promises without having any conditions on me. Don't get legalistic on me talking about*

obedience!" Obedience doesn't get you into the family photo, faith in Jesus does that. But now that you are in the family, God's presence and power is promised to those who are living like they are in the family, on mission together. And in our text today, Acts 5:12-42, we see what that kind of Spirit filled obedience to the mission looks like and what it results in...

Obedience to the mission results in...

1. Fruitful labor 5:12-16

God blesses obedience! God is working out his plan through those who obey him. The language Luke uses here makes it clear it is **by** their hands, **through** their hands these signs and wonders were done... But it is **not** by their power, they are simply the agent of a power at work and if you read Acts 1-4 that power is the Holy Spirit.

a. God's Spirit is the power

Luke has said it so much already he doesn't mention it in 5:12, but here's the theme... Don't even write these references down, just underline Holy Spirit in your Bible starting in Acts 1... Acts 1:2 Jesus... "gave commands through the **Holy Spirit** to the apostles..."

Acts 1:5 "you will be baptized with the **Holy Spirit**"

Acts 1:8 "you will receive power when the **Holy Spirit** has come upon you..."

Acts 2:4 "And they were all filled with the **Holy Spirit** and began to speak..."

Acts 2:33 "...having received from the Father the promise of the **Holy Spirit**..."

Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized...and you will receive the gift of the **Holy Spirit**."

Acts 4:8 "Then Peter, filled with the **Holy Spirit**, said to them,..."

Acts 4:31 "...and they were all filled with the **Holy Spirit** and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness."

So... who is really at work here in the book of Acts?? The HS!

Who is he working through?? The apostles, by their hands, through his people who obey him! Where is the power coming from?? The HS! Spirit filled obedience is bearing fruit! God is ready to bring fruit to your labor too. But we have to be filled, yield, obey. Not empty commands. It means you can be a believer and not live a spirit filled life, tragic! But too common!

b. God's Spirit is the aroma

Last week we talked about the power of God's Spirit at Pentecost, Do you remember the adjectives Luke used to describe the reactions of the people? They were *bewildered, amazed, astonished, perplexed, marveled, confounded, confused*. Not even Jesus got this much attention. Luke quit counting the people, now all he can say is multitudes of both men and women. Easily 10, 15, 20,000 or more are now part of this Spirit filled community that Luke says was of one heart and soul, worshipping right there in the open in Solomon's portico, the outer part of the Temple. And how did the unbelieving community view them... held in high esteem...

2 Corinthians 2:15

"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."

If you are not connecting the dots yet, the aroma of Christ in us is the aroma of the Holy Spirit who **fills us** and brings fruit to our labor **as we obey him**, Spirit filled obedience to the mission generates this distinct aroma of Christ that causes some to pull back and not dare to join them

and others to draw near and be added to the fellowship. This is what should be happening even today. Hot or cold, not whatever...

c. God's Spirit is the promise fulfilled.

Jesus had promised the disciples this is what would happen.

John 14:12-17

¹² Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

¹⁵ If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

People were coming from out of town, bringing the sick and the spiritually afflicted, demon possessed and what does it say...?? how many were healed?? **All!** Jesus promised this to them and this Holy Spirit filled obedience brought fruitful labor. Do you think the early church felt God's presence? Absolutely.

God's presence is promised for God's purpose. They were hpftwbtG.

Secondly, Obedience to the mission results in...

2. Opposition and Testing.

We hate this as Americans. Somehow we have bought into this inalienable right we have for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And if we are obedient to God that somehow he owes that to us. We may not say that, but that's how we feel.

God has a much greater purpose for us than our comfort.

So, here's what you can expect...when you obey...

a. It draws persecution. Read 5:17-18

These are the religious leaders! Instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit, what are they filled with?? Jealousy! Obviously they don't believe, no Holy Spirit, so they have a vacancy sign on their heart and it gets filled with the wrong stuff... Pride, religious sincerity and filling their baskets with religious good works... and when religious people see Spirit filled obedience welling up in those who have stopped playing their dead religious game, when they see this Spirit filled community experiencing God's Mercy and grace and generosity, this aroma of Christ... instead of repenting and believing, they are filled with jealousy. It's convicting to them too. Happens to us!

Spirit filled obedience **does not** generate a response of "whatever." It's hot or cold. So, obedience is not the easy road...and it's a natural human response to avoid behaviors that bring persecution. You don't have to go looking for trouble or try to stir things up. Just obey Jesus, be filled with the Holy Spirit and leave the results up to him. God will bless it and work wonders in you and through you, but it will also bring persecution. So in the testing, when you obey it...

b. It requires perseverance read 19-21

Imagine you are one of the 12 apostles and God has blessed your Spirit filled obedience and you are leading this growing fellowship of 20k people and all of the sudden all 12 of you are arrested and are in prison, the public prison, not a great place. You can imagine the new guy,

Matthias speaks up as they sit in the cold, dark, smelling cells of the prison... "OK guys, maybe we need to move our meetings out of the Temple courts, I mean, we keep getting in trouble there. Maybe we should move out into the countryside like Jesus did, or by the river Jordan like John the Baptist, at least where we are not so in the spotlight and asking for this abuse." That would be a very reasonable conversation and suggestion. Find a more comfortable spot. Maybe they all agreed, and then... an angel show up, open's the prison doors and brings them out.

Now we don't know if the apostles were reconsidering their strategy, but God sends a clear message through the angel... "*Go and stand in the Temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.*"

OK, so much for the let's be less conspicuous idea! **ALL** the words of this life. No compromising the message, no cutting corners, no softening the message, no trying to be subtler or strategic... Go right back to that place where you were persecuted and keep on being bold! V21, so...when they heard this from the angel, they went home and prayed about it for a few weeks... no! they entered the Temple at daybreak and began to teach! Love that! That takes some perseverance to get back up and obey. No one said Spirit filled obedience is easy, but it's blessed, and when you persevere in the testing it...

c. It generates perplexity 21b-26, read.

I think Luke is having some fun writing this... We know something the religious leaders don't know yet. The prison is empty! The guards don't even know! Can you imagine being the officers who were sent to the prison to get the apostles and then having to report this news to these seriously bad and powerful leaders who were filled with jealousy? "Ummm. I have some good news and some bad news... Ok, give us the good news, well we found the prison... doors were securely locked... guards were at their posts... OK, soooo the bad news... No one was inside the prison." Ok, show me the look on the leaders faces... Not happy campers! Then another guy comes in and says, "*you are not going to believe this... they are in the Temple teaching again!*" Now they are afraid. Spirit filled obedience generates perplexity...

Most of us never get to experience this, why...?? because we bail out as soon as the going gets tough. We love to be the aroma of life and experience the blessing of God, but as soon as someone thinks we are the aroma of death, we dial it back! Ask my wife, I don't like conflict, my go to strategy is conflict avoidance, smooth things over.

What do you do when your obedience to the mission results in some heat and persecution? This may be the biggest problem in the church today, people who know what Jesus has commanded but they are not obeying or observing his commands because it brings discomfort. We lack the power and the awe and his presence, not because we don't **know** what God wants us to do, it's because we don't **do** what he wants us to do. God's presence is promised for those who are faithful to his purpose. God help us to be those who obey everything Jesus has commanded. Thirdly obedience to the mission results in...

3. Greater clarity for the mission.

When the heat is on, our flesh is going to be looking for the path of least resistance, but what should I do? Lean in not out. Don't make apologies, Spirit filled obedience under pressure clarifies at least three components of the mission for us, first...

a. Our calling, read 5:27-29

The fear of man here would have produced all kinds of potential responses. Major temptation to dial it back and try to smooth things out, "*let's make this work!*" I've been there... Fear of man and the approval of man are powerful forces in our decision making.

But when you have already settled the matter in your heart, "*I must obey God rather than men*"... there is a clarity that makes the decision of what to do simple and it adds this element of urgency, "*I must*". What should I do? I must obey God!

"What should I do...? Are you asking that question about a particular situation in your life, are you feeling some heat, some pressure, some fear, insecurity, some testing? Stay on course. God promises his presence and power for those who do.

I must obey God rather than men.

second, obedience under pressure clarifies...

b. The message, read 5:30-32

When I am under pressure, what should I say? You're just a herald, you don't need to be creative with the message, just be clear. Jesus died, God raised him from the dead- it's a fact- these evil leaders knew it- they weren't disputing the resurrection, they just wanted them to quit talking about it. That's what your enemy wants you to do, stop talking about it! ...And God has made Jesus Lord and savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins, and then our big idea is right there in v32..."*And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who...// obey him.*"

This is part of the gospel, the good news! God's presence is available to everyone who believes and obeys.

Don't change the message- don't cut corners or try to soften it, the gospel itself is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Herald it, and leave the results to God. But fasten your seat belts because it also clarifies

c. The opposition to our mission. read 5:33-37

Amazing how the name of Jesus can divide people. These guys lost it. They came unglued. Their tidy little religious world of rules and managing people and holding onto power was being overwhelmed by the spirit filled obedience of 12 simple, uneducated men, who knew their mission- to obey God, who boldly proclaimed the message with clarity, who didn't mask the smell of Jesus by being subtle. God's presence in our lives is the Smell of life or smell of death. You have to be both. In 2 Cor 2 Paul goes on to say, "*who is sufficient for these things, not our smell! For we are not like so many peddlers of God's word (religious opportunists), but as men of sincerity as commissioned by God in the sight of God, we speak in Christ.*"

This is not our mission, It's God's mission, he commissioned us, he sent us...

Final point...obedience to the mission results in...

4. God's presence in your life

obedience aligns us with...

a. God's plan, not ours. Read 5:38-39.

Gamaliel was spiritually blind, but God used him here. Good advice, Man's plans always ultimately fail, so leave them alone. But if this is of God... *can you believe he even opens the door for that possibility?*...if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. ?? Do you think there were some people in that chamber of priests and leaders who heard that and now they started asking, maybe this is of God?

6:7 peak ahead and read... God's presence had left the corrupt religious system a long time ago, I imagine these priests who believed, saw that God's presence was with these people and they left the emptiness of religion for a personal relationship with God. No one is beyond the reach of coming home.

This is why we can have confidence in our mission: hpftwbtG, we are showing them the way home, and God's presence in our lives is a powerful part of that.

Sometimes those who are the most hostile and vocal against the gospel are the closest to believing. So don't let a negative response or persecution cause you to lose your joy.

Spirit filled obedience aligns us with...

b. God's joy, read 5:40-42

I wish I could leave the beating part out, sometimes that's part of our story. But when God's presence is this real to you, you rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer dishonor for his name. So what did they do the next day...??

They did what the angel told them the day before... Back to the temple and to speaking about Jesus.

Anytime, anywhere, to anyone, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ, the messiah is who...?? Jesus! Staying on course with God's Mission... hpftwbtG

Do you see the big idea??

God's presence is promised for God's mission.

Obedience to the mission matters. That's why we are talking about this!

So if you are struggling with experiencing God's presence, maybe you are struggling with obedience. Let me give you some motivation. **John 14:21**, Jesus promised something to those who obey him...

"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

That's a promise to you. God wants to love you and show himself to you. He wants his presence to be with you always to the very end of the age. He will keep this promise, but we need to play our part, let's help each other, spur each other on, let's do it together!

Pray