

## WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO STOP YOU ORIGINS SERIES PART 2 - GOING VIRAL Dan Burrell

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Good morning Life Fellowship. I am so glad to be here this morning and to be back in the book of Acts. If you are visiting with us today, thank you for being here, and I want you to kind of know up front that we are a church that loves digging down in the Scriptures. We love just getting in there, unpacking it, finding out what the Lord is saying to us, and then finding some practical takeaways to take home. And we are going to be in just such a passage this morning.

Beginning in January we started this series in Acts, and we went through the first four chapters during the first quarter of the year. Then we kind of took a break and did some emphasis on missions and the Easter celebration. And last week Pastor Ben, our other teaching pastor, began looking at Acts Chapter 5, and the frightening story of Ananias and Sapphira. They were the couple who made commitments about gifts they were going to give in front of the church, and in front of God, and then they didn't keep it, but held money back. And the Lord struck them dead right there in the church. In other news we anticipate huge offerings during the month of April at Life Fellowship. *(Laughter.)* Of course I am just kidding. We do have a little bit of a budget deficit, but let the Lord move as He leads you. *(Laughter.)*

Today we are going to be in the second part of Acts Chapter 5, and I have been looking forward to this. Quite honestly I am a little intimidated by it because there is a lot left in this passage. And I am going to ask you to bear with me today as we get into this passage as it talks about persecution. There is a lot to unload here as it is a lengthy passage. As you know I am also a part time college professor, and so I like to warn my students before we get into a lecture that it may be a little intense, so you might need to kind of buckle your seatbelts and get prepared for a huge information dump.

But I believe the Holy Spirit will help you process it even over the rest of the week as you go back in and you study it some more for yourself. Remember today is not the only time during the week which we should be eating from the Word of God. I hope today is kind of like the appetizer, and that you will get into this passage this week and begin the process of exploring it even further, because due to time constraints Pastor Ben nor I are able to just get everything wrung out of a passage that is there. So we just kind of set the table, provide you with the utensils, show you the menu, and then ask you to go for it. And that is what we are going to be doing today.

Before we get into Acts Chapter 5 where we will begin in verse 17 in just a moment, I noticed something when I opened one of my news sites this week. There was an article that was citing fresh information - actually the article came from Britain - and the headline said this: 'Persecution of Christians Reaches Near Genocidal Levels.' And you can actually look up that article where you will find tons of information from

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research that has been going on. Now, after reading that, I really wasn't surprised because I have been seeing some things that have been going on in the news from a distance for a while. And for reasons that we can all speculate on, maybe we even have our own conspiracy going on, I will say this - that it hasn't really been on the radar of the media a lot in recent years, but there is a great wave of persecution that is being unleashed on the church of Jesus Christ globally, as not seen in generations. And some are even suggesting it is simply because of the size of human population now compared to previous eons that this is an unprecedented level of persecution.

Now we in this country are largely immune to it. We are distant from it. In fact much of the persecution that is taking place around the world is happening to people who do not share the majority of Americans skin color. There seems to be a little bit of a correlation and you can draw whatever conclusion you want to from this, but the darker the skin it seems like less of a deal they tend to make of it. If you could see what is happening in northern Africa today, it is literally heartbreaking at what is happening to entire villages of African Christians in the northern part of the continent under Islam.

I did some research real quickly as I wanted to set this up, and I went to a site that I like to go to often, and that is *opendoorsusa.org*. In fact I wear always a bracelet from them that I got years ago, and I have actually had to replace it every so often because it is rubber and it wears out. But I keep it on because I have made friends with people in oppressed countries who I know are suffering. I also wear my One Life bracelet, and I hope you have one as well, where I am praying for someone very specifically to trust Christ this year. But this Open Door USA bracelet reminds me to pray for my friends who are in areas of the world where Christians are being persecuted. Open Door USA is the organization that produces this bracelet which looks like barbed wire and is representative of a prison fence.

I went to them to do some research and here is what I found. This research was done through the late part of 2017 till November 2018, so it is about four to five months old. It is research from the top fifty world watch countries that are being watched around the globe. The organization found that there were 245 million Christians in the world right now who were experiencing high levels of persecution for their choice to follow Christ. That represents about one in nine Christians worldwide who are experiencing some kind of persecution. The rise in the number of Christians in the top fifty countries of the 2019 world watch list was 14 percent who were experiencing high levels of persecution. That means it is 14 percent greater than the same date last year.

Last year 4,136 Christians were killed for faith related reasons in the top fifty countries. By the way there is some evidence that that number has already been

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surpassed this year, but even last year there was 4,136 Christians killed. Two thousand six hundred and 25 Christians were detained without trial, but were arrested, sentenced and imprisoned in the top fifty countries. One thousand two hundred and sixty-six churches or Christian buildings were attacked in the top 50 countries. Several of those were in China where they literally brought cranes and bulldozers in and leveled the entire building.

Seven out of ten people in the world's top ten countries are suffering because of Islamic oppression. Maybe you think that sounds like Islamic-phobia, but no, that is Islamic fact. And we need to understand that, and get off of the political correctness business. And we need to remember this - that Islam in many parts of the world is practiced at an extreme where if you are not a follower of Islam, and have any other religion, but particularly Christianity, your life is at risk. They will behead you, they will torture you, they will run you out of your job, and they will run you out of your home. And seven of the top ten countries who are experiencing this are in the Islamic world. And we need to be very much aware of that.

There are eleven countries that score in the extreme level now while five years ago there was only one, with that one being North Korea. For the last eighteen years the number one country has been North Korea. By the way the second most depressive regime that a Christian can live under besides Islam is Communism. So we knew to be aware of that as well as we kind of flirt with the kissing cousin of Communism which is Socialism.

And we also know that 2019 has seen a huge escalation, even in the first four months. Maybe you are thinking, *'Yeah, but Pastor Dan that is interesting, and I know you are supposed to talk about this kind of stuff because we are going into a passage of persecution about the early church in Jerusalem and so forth, but we live in the United States of America. We live in the greatest country that has ever been in terms of religious freedom and economic promise.'*

And granted we do, but the Bible tells us also that where much is given much is required, not just expected, and much should be anticipated from us. We stand in a position with loud voices and freedom of expression. We have the opportunity to meet in places like this in comfortable facilities that are climate controlled and designed for flow and presentation. But my question for the church today is - what would we do if it got to us? What would we do if it really got a little hard to serve Christ?

And this morning I just kind of want to tell you up front as we go through this passage, and as we make some applications, that we need to think hard about this. I want to make us a little uncomfortable. Even as I thought about it, I wondered what I

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would be willing to do. Would I be willing to do as Peter and John did and stand up to the authorities? With the idea that I had just been in prison and was likely going to end up in prison again, if I found myself suddenly out of jail having been put in jail for preaching, would my first response be to go back and preach again? What if they were threatening my wife and my children? What if they were threatening to burn my house down? If they held a gun to the head of somebody I loved, would I still respond in a way where I would stand against persecution? And if I find myself flinching today at little levels of persecution, or misunderstanding, or irritation, how much more would it be required of me to stand against real opposition?

Well, we will see the examples of the disciples in Acts Chapter 5, so that is where I want us to turn in our Scripture this morning. We are going to be in verses 17 through 42. Now you may be thinking that is a long passage of Scripture and it is. I was going to just read it straight through, but it is a long block of Scripture, so I want to kind of break it into some bite sized pieces.

Now I want you to think about what we are just about to read here as kind of a play, and there are will be actually seven scenes in that play. So as we read through this I am going to pause between each scene, or act, and then kind of explain what has just happened. So as you read this Scripture with me, please think of it as the idea of a play, and we have seven scenes to study.

The first scene we are going to see is in verses 17 and 18, and this is talking about the high priest who is the religious authority for Israel. Now remember Israel was living under the Roman Empire during this time. So there was some dual authority. There was a local authority and then there was the Roman Empire's authority. The Roman Empire had made allegiances with local authority. In terms of civil government they brought their own people in, such as Herod and others, who were the governors of the regions they had captured at that time.

We are focused here in Jerusalem in Israel. Also in order to maintain control what would happen is they would make alliances toward the greatest governing authority that would be local. So for Israel the greatest authority would have been the Jewish religious leadership, and they were very influential. The king and the high priest always had to be working in tandem with each other. There was this separation between church and state, but make no mistake the influence of the church at times was far greater even than the influence of the king and of the state, and vice versa, at different times during history.

So we have the Roman authority, but also there were those who was very powerful and that was the high priest and the council of religious leaders. And this is

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who we are going to see in verses 17 and 18. So here is what the Scripture says beginning in verse 17: ***“But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.”***

So we see a couple things in this scene. First of all you have the high priest, he was the top dog, and he has his council of advisers which is the Sadducees. Now among the religious leaders there are different parties, different groups that represent this authority. Among the chief of those were the Sadducees, who were very highly educated and very devout men. One of the things about the Sadducees is they didn't believe in anything supernatural. They didn't believe in miracles, or signs and wonders. They were very practical and stayed very close to the Scripture, but they didn't believe in supernatural occurrences that God did.

So we have the Sadducees working with the high priest, and what was the motivation there? According to the Scripture it was jealousy. Always remember this - that when political power brokers find their positions threatened, they will respond with jealousy. And that is exactly what happened here. They didn't like the fact that people were listening to the apostles instead of listening to them.

Now for scene 2 we are going to see something miraculous happen in verse 19. ***“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life. And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.’”***

Now this is really cool. All the apostles had been out in the streets preaching and teaching, and then they were taken to prison. The high priest thought he had them under control, but during the night an angel came and opened the prison doors, brought them out and told them to go back and do what they had been doing before they were imprisoned. So they went back into the temple at daybreak, when the first people were arriving, and they started preaching all over again.

Now let's look in scene 3, because the high priest is going to get the Sanhedrin together to deal with these apostles that he thinks are still in prison. He thinks they are still in jail. So look if you would in verse 21: ***“Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ‘We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.’”***

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*“Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, ‘Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.”*

So this is kind of a humorous scene to me because now you have the high priest bringing all his buddies together, the Sadducees, the Council, probably a few Pharisees mixed in and some Scribes. These were the elite of the religious system gathered there. And now they were going to decide what to do with these guys who had been out preaching all the time, and who had been saying that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead, and they just couldn't have this. And these religious leaders were jealous because the apostles were causing a distraction and people were listening to them.

And then the officers came in and said, *‘Hey, I thought you had those preacher guys put in prison.’* And the chief priest probably said something like, *‘Yes, they are in prison, go get them and bring them here.’* And the officers said, *‘No, we can't because the prison is empty.’* And the religious leaders probably said, *‘Well, how could that be?’* Remember the Sadducees didn't believe in anything supernatural. And the man said, *‘Well, the doors were closed, and the guards were there, but the preachers were not there.’*

So the religious leaders were not able to understand that God Himself had released the apostles. And then someone comes running in and says, *‘Hey, you know the guys that were supposed to be in prison, well, I was just down at the temple and they are just preaching away to the people there.’* And so the high priest told the officers to go get them, but this time they didn't take the apostles by force. They didn't beat them or arrest them, because they were out in the public square, and they knew that the hearts of the people were turned toward the message of the apostles. So they knew they couldn't take the apostles by force for fear of the people rising up against them.

Remember they were interested in protecting their power. And so the officers just asked the apostles to come with them because the high priest wanted to talk to them. And the apostles willingly went with them to be brought back to appear before the Sanhedrin.

Now look if you would in verse 27 because we will see there is an interrogation that is going to occur before the Sanhedrin. And the Sanhedrin is this council consisting of a large group of Scribes, Pharisees, priests and other religious leaders. *“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here*

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*you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."*

*"But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.'" Boy, they didn't pull any punches, did they? "God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.' When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them."*

So on this scene, which is a rather complex scene, we have several things going on. First of all we have the high priest who is kind of serving as the chief interrogator and he is the guy who is getting ready to make the case. He says he has three accusations against them, and they are in trouble because of them. The first thing is this - *'I told you to stop preaching and what did you do? You are back out there preaching. Secondly, not only are you preaching, but you are causing problems because you have filled the city with this message. You have filled the entire region. All the people that were looking to us are now listening to you, and that is a problem. And the third thing is this - really we know what it is all about, it is about revenge. You are mad because we killed your leader.'*

So these are three pretty significant, pretty powerful accusations that the high priest was making. And now Peter decides to kind of slap back at them. And I love this. This was Peter who at times could just be a little overwrought, and a little loud. But here in very calm, clear and measured declarative tones he says, *'No, let's make sure we understand this. First of all we are not going to obey you over God. We are going to obey God over you. So let's put that out there as a foundation for everything you are about to hear. When it comes to who we are following, on this date we are following God.'*

*'Secondly, we want you to understand this - it was God who raised Jesus, the Savior, our Leader from the dead after you all did kill Him. So let's make sure we all understand what has occurred here. You killed Him, God brought Him back to life, we are following Him still, and we are teaching about Him.'*

Peter made it very, very clear that they just weren't going to accept those accusations unanswered. And I also love this - he still slipped in the gospel message because here is what he said, *'And by the way, we are here to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. That's the message we are preaching here. The message is, 'Israel, please repent before it is too late. Get forgiveness of your sins so you can have*

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*eternal life. And we are the witnesses of that. We saw this, and now we proclaim this, we are giving testimony to what we have seen and we are sharing that with others.'*

And the religious leaders' response was, '*Let's just kill them. Enough! Enough! No more of this. Let's just take care of the problem by killing them.*' So that was the conclusion of scene 4. And now we have an interesting newcomer showing up in scene 5 whose name is Gamaleil. In verse 34 we see this: ***“But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, ‘Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.’”***

***“After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”***

Now Gamaleil was an interesting character. He was a Pharisee, not a Sadducee. Because he was a Pharisee he believed in the supernatural. He believed in this idea that God was omnipotent, all powerful, and could do things miraculous in nature. He was a very educated man, and in saying these things he made his case. He was reviewing a little history with them, and he reminded them about Theudas who had been an insurrectionist. And he was eventually killed and nothing happened after that. And then he reminded them of Judas the Galilean (this is a different Judas than the one who betrayed Jesus). Judas the Galilean rose up, and he was killed, and all of his people just scattered.

Gamaleil was telling them not to make a big deal out of this, and he was warning them they should not make martyrs out of these men. He told them if this was of man it would soon disappear, and if it was of God they certainly did not want to be seen as opposing God. Now I want you to understand this - some people misinterpret this Scripture and say, '*Oh here is where God sent this special messenger to intervene.*'

But I would take another tack at that. First of all, there is no evidence at all that Gamaleil ever trusted Christ. He was a Pharisee, and he was not a friend of the apostles. He was just interested in a peaceful resolution. He was a political pragmatist. He was the guy who would say something like this. '*Maybe if we just put it off a little while and don't make it be a big deal, it will go away.*' There was nothing noble in his posture

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other than to say, ‘Let’s avoid making another martyr out of these men like we did of their leader.’

And you will often see that in political strife around the world where they are very careful because people rally around martyrs. And you see this as one of the reasons why this thing in Venezuela is stretching out so long, because they know if they turn to one side or the other, and they have a high profile murder that they are liable to turn that person into a martyr, and the next thing you know the whole country can erupt into civil war. By the way one other thing I want to point out is you can find the stories of Judas and of Theudas in classical history. Josephus mentions these guys, so there is a cross reference there. I am not going to get into all that because we don’t have enough time

Gamaleil was just a good politician; he wasn’t a good person. He was just playing along for a while. But God did use this, at least temporarily, because at this point we see scene 6 unfolding. Let’s look if you would at the end of verse 39. **“So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”**

And what we have here in this passage is the beating of the apostles that occurred. Now beatings that occurred at the hands of religious leaders were usually thirty nine stripes. And the reason for that is because you were not allowed, under Jewish law, to beat anyone more than forty times. So to make sure that they didn’t go over forty, they would take one off, and stop at thirty nine times. Now we don’t know for sure what kind of beating this was, but we suspect that it was a different kind of beating than what Jesus experienced, which would have been with the Roman cat of nine tails, and which often people would die from.

But a beating is a beating, and it would have been no fun, whether it was with a cane, or whether it was a leather strap that was used. Whatever was used it says that they beat the apostles, and then they let them go, thinking that if they were beaten enough they would not be as inclined to go back out and preach again.

Now let’s look at the final scene, which is scene 7, beginning in verse 41. **“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing.”** Wait a minute - they were rejoicing? **“Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”**

In this final scene what are the apostles doing? They go right back to teaching and preaching. What was it going to take to stop them? It was going to take more than a beating. It was going to take more than imprisonment. It was going to take more than a

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trial. It was going to take more than threats. It was going to take more than intimidation. It was going to take more than anything that they had at this point hurled their way.

Now I want to draw five quick conclusions before we end here to provoke some thought on our part. What would it take to stop us from doing what God has called us to do? Because if the church is going to go viral, we are going to have to be committed. If the gospel in Lake Norman is going to spread like wildfire, it is going to require some of us to act like we really believe this stuff, like this is really important, like this is a priority, like this is true, like this is worthy of sacrifice. And what we should be praying for is for each other in this church, and in likeminded churches as well, who love the gospel of Christ and that is that we would have a generation that would rise up.

And above anything that Satan could hurl at us, or any form of intimidation, that we in our own work places, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our communities, and in our clubs, would be willing to stand up and say, *‘Jesus first - here is the gospel - He loves you and He died for you. Find hope in Him and He will give eternal life to you. Trust in Him. Accept forgiveness from Him. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins.’* That is the message that we need to take across Lake Norman.

Here are the takeaways. Number one - suffering is a byproduct of fully following Christ and we ought to anticipate it. Suffering is a byproduct of fully following Christ and we need to anticipate it. If the extent of our willingness to be messengers of the gospel of Christ is only until we experience the first wave of opposition that comes our direction then we will never see it go viral. We will never see it spread. If all it takes is an annoyed sigh, a little bit of displeasure, a little bit of intimidation, *‘not here, not now, not in this place;’* a little bit of discouragement, *‘Well, I was out there and nobody responded;’* if that is the extent that we are willing to invest our energy and our calling and our passion into the gospel, then we will never see it go viral.

Rather conversely, we need to anticipate this. And the apostles anticipated it. Do you think they might have gotten a hint of what was going to happen when they went out there and preached? Well, let’s see - what had happened back in Chapters 3 and 4? We know they had already been brought before the religious leaders. We know they had already been threatened. We know they had already been put in prison before. And then they took all twelve of them and put them in the clink. And when they got out, what did they do? Did they go home and say, *‘Well, we are going to have to have a little smarter strategy. We are going to have to be a little smarter?’*

Did they do that? Did they think they should head for another city? Did they think they should wait a while and let things die down before going out again? Is that how they were thinking? No, their thinking was they wouldn’t even go home and take a

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shower; they would just go right back out and preach. They realized that what they were doing was so important and had caught the people's attention so much that the religious leaders who were against them were afraid of them. *'We need to treat them with kid's gloves, at least in public.'* But then they beat them half to death when no one was looking.

A faith that costs little is going to accomplish little. What would it take to get you to stop following Christ? What would it take to get you to stop sharing your faith? Now here is the tough question - are you even sharing your faith so that there is any reason for opposition against you at all? The fact is that many of us don't need opposition because we aren't doing anything anyway. But if you start doing something, you can expect opposition, because Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees. And Satan gets involved when he sees you take it to the street.

Here is the second principle - the presence of suffering does not mean the absence of joy. And I love this. So here we have the apostles, and stop and think about it, this is a confusing time, it is a difficult time. They didn't even have their own houses; they were staying with other people. They didn't know where they were going next or what would be involved. They just knew that they were supposed to be teaching and preaching, so they were just going about it. And every time they get out there, somebody came and told them to *'Shut up. Stop. Don't do this anymore.'*

They kept being thrown in prison. But like the Energizer bunny they just would get out of prison and off they would go again to the temple and start preaching. And their response wasn't to be discouraged. Their response wasn't to ask each other if they were still bleeding from the beating. Their response wasn't to ask each other if this was really worth it. No, their response was to rejoice - to rejoice!

Recently I was in a meeting with Bob Williamsen who is the head of our elder team, and there was a friend of his who had just gotten back from India just a few days before. And Bob was just overflowing with stories and so forth. And he pulls his phone out and starts flipping through some pictures and he showed me a picture of a young Indian family. It was a husband and a wife and they were holding their little child and they were all smiling happily. It was a beautiful picture.

And he told me the story about this family who a couple of weeks ago were teaching, when some Hindu priests came into their town and told them they had to stop teaching. The couple responded that they were not going to stop teaching. The Hindu priests said if they did not stop they were going to be killed.

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This little pastor went out and preached that afternoon. And the Hindu authorities got a mob together and they took this couple, they stripped them naked, and with them carrying their little child they marched them up and down the streets of their village. People were spitting at them, laughing at them and taking pictures of them.

Maybe you are wondering how many years ago that happened. That happened this year. That was a recent happening. And those people are every bit as real, every bit as important to Jesus Christ as you and I are here in comfortable Lake Norman, North Carolina. It is happening. I looked at that picture, and I looked in their faces, and do you know what I saw? I saw joy. They were smiling. They were at peace. There was no humiliation that they were not willing to endure that would take away that which God had given them. And that was the peace and the joy of a relationship with Him. So even if you face opposition, understand this, it doesn't mean you will lose your joy.

Here is the third thing - following Jesus may call us to acts of civil disobedience. I want you to buckle your seat belts on this one for just a moment, okay? We are called to obey God over man. That is very clear throughout Scripture. ***“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”*** Peter said, ***“We will obey God rather than man.”*** There are some who would wonder how the church in America will respond should we be placed in a situation where we lose the protections that are currently provided by our constitution and laws.

I am not. I don't believe those days are right in front of us. Instead what I am worried about is that we are already collapsing, and we have never even faced any real opposition. I am not afraid of what will happen when we face the opposition; I am afraid of what we are doing when we are not facing any opposition. When we care more about what the world thinks of us instead of what God thinks of us and what He has clearly instructed us to do, we will end up worshipping at the feet of the faux gods of comfort, access, popularity, celebrity, wealth, affirmation, adulation, political position, convenience and power.

This generation of Christians in this country, from my perspective at least, seem hell-bent on mimicking the world, not resisting the world. We have stopped resisting the world and we have started imitating it. Instead of thundering against sin we join in it. We embrace it, we rationalize it, or we simply acquiesce to it. Certainly, many of us have been convinced that we can no longer speak freely against it. To do so might cause others to think we are being hateful, or intolerant, or out of the mainstream.

We have allowed the very definitions of sin to be redefined under our watch, and so we now find ourselves living in a world that Scripture calls evil, but we are calling good. And things that Scripture calls good, we are calling evil. And in doing so, we

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water down the pillars of the gospel message - honesty, virtue, holiness, morality, chastity, fidelity and purity. And these are not dirty words, these are godly words, these are important words. And to stand for them is not hate, or intolerant, or legalism; it is being truthful. It is being compassionate, and most importantly it is being Christ-like.

We need to stop apologizing for the things that nailed our Savior to the cross. We need to quit playing fast and loose with the truth of Scripture. We need to quit compromising the attributes of God. We need to quit trying to blend in and resume our calling to be salt and light in a world and culture that is sprinting into the darkness.

And whether it is issues of morality and the context for how God created us as men and women - either you are a male or you are a female. Or whether it is the context of our sexuality to be enjoyed exclusively in a covenant relationship between a man and a woman with fidelity, solely with each other throughout the course of an entire life until death parts us. That is not hate talk; that is God's plan. And when we quit talking about it, and when we open it up to just whatever you are feeling, or whatever is good for you, or as long as you are consenting adults, we deny the authority of the holiness of God that says when we fall short of His mark, we are in danger of damnation.

The only hope we have for redemption is to repent of that which is evil. But when we make nothing evil we have no need of a Savior. And so we walk around in ignorant bliss living selfish lives of self-indulgence, participating in our lowest impulses, and nobody saying out loud anymore that this is wrong because we are afraid somebody is not going to like us.

I am not suggesting we be harsh, I am not suggesting we be ugly and I am not suggesting that we get big old signs like that crazy church that everybody is overreacting to that represents one tiny family in a town that nobody has ever heard of in the middle of who knows where Kansas. I am talking about us, the church united, saying it is not about what we think, it is about what God's Word says. And if someone doesn't believe in the Word of God it does not in any way remove us from the obligation that if it is true we will face consequences for it. (*Amen.*)

Do you believe the Bible is true? Do you believe that hell is hot? Do you believe that life is real? Do you believe that death is certain? If we believe these things, do you believe that Jesus is who He said He was? Do you believe that He lived and died for our sins? Do you believe that He suffered for our sins so that we could have forgiveness? Have you come to a point in your life where you have said, *'I can't save myself. I can't be good enough, devout enough, faithful enough, or generous enough to save myself. I have to have Jesus.'* Have you come to a point where you have trusted Him as your Lord and Savior in your imperfections knowing that we are going to fail in the future but we

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are claiming the grace of Christ? Have you come to that point and has it transformed your destiny? Has it secured your eternity? Do you believe that with all of your heart? Then if you do, let the people of God say so. (*Applause.*)

Enough namby pamby business of us being afraid that we are going to offend, because the gospel is going to offend. The gospel is going to stir us up through the Holy Spirit. We don't have to be ugly, we don't have to be fanatical, we don't have to be maniacal, and we don't have to be hateful. And just because someone calls it hate it doesn't make it hate; sometimes it is love. It is love that would cause you to reach out to the little kid that is getting ready to step in front of a bus and grab them by their arms and pull them to safety. It may feel a little harsh, it may feel a little uncomfortable, but when you are grabbing them you are interested in only one thing - you want to save them.

And when you say to somebody, '*please listen, God is real, sin is awful, hell is worse, we need to do something about it.*' When you have some passion, when you believe that you are not committing an act of hate, you are committing an act of love. And some will misunderstand it; that's a given. But if they insist on misunderstanding, then it is because they are not ready to receive the truth. And then we just need to be patient, accepting them where they are, and loving them to where they need to be.

But I think sometimes we have listened to the re-definition of what love looks like to the point that we are afraid to speak the truth in love. Please don't misunderstand me, I am not talking about being harsh, I am talking about being helpful. I am not talking about being unkind; I am talking about lovingly sharing the good news regardless of what other people may think. It is not our responsibility how others receive it; it is our responsibility to share it. And the Holy Spirit will do what only God can do when we obey the command to do what God has called us to do.

Number four - Our endorsement is God, and that comes from Him first and foremost. We don't need to worry about whether the government likes what we are doing. You don't need to worry about whether or not other denominations, or other religious leaders, or politicians like it, all you have to do is remember our calling comes from God and we are to obey Him rather than man.

And then number five - faithfulness in ministry is strengthened when we focus on obeying God and loving people. Obeying God and loving people is what God has called us to do. It is really simple, it is really plain, and it is really direct. This morning we saw these simple apostles who had never gone to seminary, they had never gone to Sadducees school, they weren't experts in Jewish law, and most people looked down on them as commoners, but they were able to stand for their faith, look people in the eye and say, '*We can but do this, we can only preach what we have seen and what we have heard.*'

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And that is why the gospel was going to go viral. That in the midst of the opposition, the threats, the humiliation, the inconvenience, the sacrifice and the beatings, they not only continued in the work of the gospel, they considered it to be a privilege. And they exhibited joy. So my challenge to you is this - high school student, when is the last time you stood up for what you believe even in your classroom? College student, are you willing to receive the scorn that comes with saying, *'I believe the Bible is the Word of God? I believe that Jesus is who He said He is?'* Young married mom, when you are working, when you are at the gym, when you are hanging out with your friends, are you willing to share what Christ has done in your life? Business man, father, weekend warrior on the football field, when you are out with the guys are you salt and light, or are you at the strip club with all the rest? Do you sound like a Christian, or when you miss a pass, do you sound just like everybody else?

If you were to share your faith, would your life give credence to it, because if you won't suffer in the small things we will never suffer in light of the big things? And we have to be intentional. We have to keep at it. Don't let them stop you. Don't be unkind but don't be intimidated. Keep pecking at it, teaching, preaching, modeling, sharing, explaining, inviting, helping, investing, sacrificing and watch what will happen. The Holy Spirit will take root in people's lives, and we will see the gospel go viral yet again.

Our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed. As we conclude we will have this time of examination and response. May I ask you right where you are seated to say, *'Lord, show me where I might stand up and share my faith with courage and conviction to those who need to hear.'* If there is someone that the Holy Spirit brings into your mind, maybe you need to have lunch with them and say, *'Hey you know what, I need to share something with you.'*

Is there something that you are doing that would be an impediment? *'I can't let them know I am a Christian because they see me doing this and they hear me saying that.'* If that is true maybe you need to sharpen your sword a little. Maybe you need to trim your wick a little bit and make your light brighter. Maybe you need to refill your salt shaker, and start living the life that gives credibility to the kingdom, to the gospel. If you blend in with the world, you don't have anything the world needs. So maybe it is time for us to recommit to holiness. Maybe it is time for us to stand out a little bit.

Maybe you would say, *'Dan, I don't know Christ as my Savior. I hear this but I have to tell you right now I think God is doing something to draw me to Himself, and I am interested in knowing what it means. What was this message that the apostles were willing to be beaten, imprisoned and eventually give their lives for? What is it that you are talking about that is worthy of people's scorn?'* If that is you this morning would

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you be willing to come and let us chat with you about what it means to be a Christ follower, to be a Christian? We won't embarrass you, we won't pressure you, but we would love to pray with you. We will show you what the Bible says and we will invite you to trust Christ. If you don't want to do that today it is not a problem for us, we will just keep loving you. But if you want to do that today, or if you have questions and you want to begin exploring that journey, why don't you come up here. I will be standing up here over to your right. Either me, Pastor Ben, or one of the elders up here would love to chat with you and pray with you.

Maybe something is going on in your life, maybe there is someone you need to witness to, maybe there is something you are struggling with that is keeping you from being able to be a testimony and a witness, and you just want someone to pray with you, if that is you then please just come up here.

If you want to take communion it is available in the front and in the back. If you want to pray with someone and you don't want to do it in here, you can slip out the back and there is a prayer room all the way to your right. If you want to become a part of this church, join a small group, be baptized, or just have questions about what Life Fellowship is about, you can go out the back to the Next Step Station in the lobby and there will be someone there who will be happy to talk to you.

But whatever you do when you hear the truth of the gospel, don't wait, don't wait. Today, God wants you to act on truth. Let's stand as we pray. *Father, we love you and we thank you for your Word. I pray that in this lengthy passage today that we can find something that will make us a little more like you, that will cause us to hit the street, share our faith, to be bold for the gospel, and to never, ever, ever quit in the face of opposition. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*