

## Scripture Reading:

Acts 5:9 "Then Peter said to [Sapphira] , "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. 11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. 12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. 16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed. 17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, 18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison."

# "The New Creation"

What comes to mind when I use the word modern?

With some it conjures up the idea of liberalism with either theology or politics and that is not what I have in mind this morning... I want us to reflect on modern living. I am thinking of David's iPhone or Theron's airplane or the 'magic' Mark & Dale do with electrons or things as simple as flush toilets. I am thinking of an age where we have abundant healthcare, despite what they do in Washington today, food enough to feed the world, all the wonders of science and the various blessings of representative government.

- In this sense we can all agree that we live in a very modern age

What I want us to consider today is when in fact this modern age began:

- The Biblical answer may seem strange to our modern ears!

In our short passage under consideration this morning, Luke, for the third time, presents the picture of life in the New Church here in Jerusalem. Once again, we must remember where Luke is going under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in his orderly account which he has written for his friend Theophilus.

- If we do not, we can learn all the wrong lessons!

Luke is telling God's story of salvation:

- Jesus has come to save His people from their sins

The problem of sin had to be dealt with so that a just God could justify His people without violating His character and holiness: As Paul teaches us in Romans three, the sacrifice of Jesus means that God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus!

- Those who are justified are now in union with Jesus making up the Church, the Body of Christ, the New Jerusalem.

The story of salvation is not primarily about my going to heaven, but it is the story of God the Father preparing a Bride for His Son: Again as Paul teaches the Ephesians, "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the Saints for the work of ministry,

for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ!”

- And finally, the Spirit has come in power to glorify the Son by filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

As Paul teaches us in I Corinthians 15; Jesus must destroy every rule and every authority and power, “for He must reign until he has put all His enemies under His feet.” Then and only then is the last enemy, death, defeated and the Kingdom given over to His Father.

- When we remember this big picture then we can rightly understand why Luke for the third time tells us what is going on in the new Church...
- Luke once again tells us that miracles are taking place, thousands are being saved and the Saints are all of one accord.

Many today long for a return to the glories of the early Church...

- We work hard to have revival meetings where thousands can be saved.
- We want people to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and hold miracle healing services
- We even distort the truth about the Saints being of one accord by thinking everyone should believe as we do, rather than the work of meeting the needs of all the Saints!

Looking at this another way, if you only see Luke’s focus on salvation in the Gospel of Luke, we fall into the American rugged individualism that we must resist: ‘It is all about me and Jesus and the only Kingdom priority is to get other people saved.’

On the other hand, there is the liberal cliff that focuses only on the expanse of the Kingdom in Acts: They work to meet everyone’s needs but fill the earth with a Kingdom that does not include the Gospel!

God’s story of salvation is about the Church, His Son’s Bride and this includes those who are members being saved from their sins AND it includes the power of this Church filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus. This is the story that Luke is telling in his orderly account and we should take heed since Mike now informs me that Luke and Acts together make up about 30% of the New Testament... Almost one-third!

Luke is reminding us in this morning’s text that the Holy Spirit has come in power bringing forth God’s new creation!

- We will not grasp this if we do not have a Biblical understanding of the BIG picture...
- This is true within and without the Church.

Let me begin with a big view of history:

- You see, how we view the big picture greatly impacts how we understand the ‘facts’ of history.

Let me use the life of Martin Luther as an example:

Luther came to understand the Biblical truth of justification by faith that had been largely lost by the Church at Rome and he wrote some books on the subject.

If you are a Roman Catholic who believes that God has used the Church at Rome to maintain His truth and build His Kingdom then you see Luther’s books as heresy.

If you are a Protestant who believes that the Spirit of God has guided the Church down through the centuries using the Bible, then you see Luther's as proclaiming an old truth that needed to be restored.

Same Man... Same books: But two completely different conclusions.

Now let's compare how the typical humanist of our day sees the history of the world with how we as Christians should understand history...

- They are radically different and which one we hold will determine how we understand all the facts!

To the humanist, the story of history is one of progress... Moving from simple matter to the glorious wonders of modern man! Looking just at man, he moves from the primitive state into basic civilization where religions had to fill in the gaps for a time about things they did not understand. The intelligence of man then brought forth science so all could be explained, including the mystery of man...

- Now we await the perfect 'one world order' where everyone can be happy and fulfilled.

Sadly there is no REAL future because as Bertrand Russell pointed out each individual life ends with his or her death, civilizations ultimately are destroyed and even the earth and our entire solar system will one day face a very violent end when the sun explodes. Now that might seem simplistic and folks might say they don't believe all that, but it is a good summary of what those who are outside the Church today practically believe...

- Evolution is taught in school as the foundation of all knowledge.
- The first millennium of the Church is seen as the 'dark' ages and real modern life was born at the enlightenment.

And of course the proof is in the pudding:

- Where we see people today living either in despair or with an attitude of eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die!

The best hope they can find is the bumper sticker which proclaims:

*'He who dies with the most toys wins!'*

- We need to learn that this man-centered picture of history stands in stark contrast with what the Bible teaches us about ancient history and what we see more recently in Church history.

Sadly many in the Church understand very little about either and here at Church of the King we do NOT want that to be the case with our covenant children!

According to the Bible the story of history is one of fall and redemption! All there is was created by the personal Triune God and man was placed graciously in a Garden that God declared to be very good. Adam rebelled against God's love and man began a long decline into sin and death: Moving in just a few generations from a perfect state in a perfect place to a world filled with so much sin and debauchery that God was sorry He had created man.

- God proceeded to justly destroy all those living except for Noah's family in the flood.
- Why was Noah saved?

Because God had made a promise to Adam that He would bring redemption through the Seed of the Woman, Jesus!

So history moves on and we see the impact of sin continue to bring man down with the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, the nations of Canaan, and even God's own people turning their backs on His covenant love time and time again. The world continues its downward spiral until we reach the time of Christ... God's appointed time when He would bring the redemption that was promised, rather than destruction and death.

Jesus would save His people from their sins and the advance of the Kingdom of Jesus would begin when the Spirit came upon the Church in power at Pentecost.

- This is the coming of the New Creation, the beginning of the restoration of all things, the real beginning of our modern world in the best use of that term.

As the Prophet Isaiah had proclaimed, "1 Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. 2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the Lord will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. 3 The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising."

Humanists see light coming at the time of the Enlightenment when men threw off the shackles of religion and proclaimed that man would be his own savior and did not need God. The Bible proclaims that Jesus came as the light of the world and Jesus said that light belongs on a lamp stand for all to see, not in our private little hearts or churches.

- Your homework for this week can be to study the last two chapters of Isaiah's prophecy where he describes the new heavens and new earth
- You will see it is NOT some future heavenly place, but a restoration of this creation!

Again, which of these views of history that we hold will impact how we see the facts... If you attend a modern school and even some seminaries you will be taught about the glories of Greece and Rome and how their laws and philosophies are the foundation of our modern life and liberties.

- You would hear about the peace of Rome even though the Empire was in a constant state of war.
- You would hear about liberty and rights, even though millions were held in abject slavery and Roman fathers could determine at birth if a child would live or die.

Greece and Rome were violent pagan cultures that worshiped a pantheon of wicked gods... AND they were the most civilized cultures in the world at that time! Cultures in the Americas and Africa were participating in human sacrifices and the eastern cultures sought Nirvana through wars and drugs.

- The world was truly in darkness when Jesus came as the light of the world, much like the time of the flood.

This small band of believers that Luke is describing for the third time faced overwhelming odds, but God was demonstrating through miracles, powerful preaching and the incredible meeting of needs that things were going to change.

The Kingdom of Jesus had come and the world would no longer be enslaved by sin... Satan was bound and now the nations of the earth would come to Jesus as they were discipled by His followers

- Man had not progressed but rather rotted under the burden of sin from Adam to Jesus!
- Jesus did not usher in the dark ages, as modern intellectuals like to refer to the first millennium of His Kingdom...

Jesus ushered in the New Creation and after a few hundred years, the impact of His Kingdom could be felt throughout the known world.

- What we see in real history is what Isaiah described in those last two chapters and what God had revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar in his dream that was interpreted by Daniel.

The King saw all the ‘great’ kingdoms of man, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome as the mighty statue that was then destroyed by a stone not cut by human hands [that would be Jesus]. A stone that struck the image and became a great mountain and filled the whole earth [that would be the Kingdom of Jesus!] And what about these great kingdoms of man?

- In the dream the wind carries them away so that not a trace of them could be found.

This is why today’s humanists refer to the first millennium as the dark ages

- The knowledge of these human kingdoms faded in the bright light of Jesus!
- The real modern age had begun and the impact of the Gospel was felt around the world and in all areas of life.

The Gospel impacted ALL of the things that modern humanists say they value:

...education for all, political liberty and freedom, scientific advances, equal rights for woman and children, advances in healthcare and concern for the poor...

- ALL of these were absent in those ancient kingdoms of man and were birthed and advanced in Christendom!

This sounds like a very bold claim in today’s climate, but it is what the Bible said would happen and what any honest review of history would reveal has in fact happened.

Now sadly the Church has withered under the assault of the enlightenment, but I can assure you that the progress of God’s Kingdom will continue!

- However, it is important for us to understand how the Church has mistakenly responded so we can find our way back...
- The way back is NOT in the past but in the future!

Just as rapid maturing in some young people can cause ‘growing pains’ and even confusion as they become young men and women, the Church seems to have been overwhelmed by the Reformation and Enlightenment.

The corruptions that had crept into God’s Church had to be cleaned out because as we learned last week, God does discipline His people. These changes impacted our understanding of the Church and many of the political institutions. In this time of confusion the humanist took the opportunity to dust off those old kingdoms and say that we needed to return to the glories of Greece and Rome.

The Church should have confronted this head on, but sadly they did not and even contributed to some of the intellectual investigations of what had gone before. Soon the humanists were claiming all of the advances of the Kingdom of Jesus as their own: Education instead of ignorance, liberty instead of slavery, science instead of superstitions. Rather than confront these lies, the Church retreated into pietism and their understanding of the advance of God’s Kingdom was largely lost.

- Instead of seeing Jesus as the light of the world, He became “my light.”
- Instead of seeing the Holy Spirit as the one who came to establish the Church and fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, He is now someone who brings me gifts!

The fact that Jesus crushed the Kingdoms of this world faded from our memory and soon all thought of a Kingdom for Jesus was placed far into the future: After all, that Kingdom was promised to Israel and they had rejected Jesus, so it would have to wait until He came back and gave them a second chance.

I could certainly fill in a lot more detail but I hope you can see how different these world views are in the world and even much of the Church. I can assure you this morning, that even though the Church is being attacked on all sides and even though many within the Church have hoisted the white flag, and sometimes even the enemy's flag...

- The Holy Spirit has not left the field of battle!
- He has come to glorify the Son and WILL fill the earth with His Kingdom!

He continues to empower the Church through the powerful preaching of the Gospel and miraculous living by those who are faithful. He continues to bring all those who God has appointed into the Church. He continues to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus just as we saw the impact of the Church at Jerusalem begin to spread to the surrounding regions in our text.

There are at least two very practical lessons for us from Acts this morning when we see things in the proper perspective:

1) First, if we really believe in the progress and advance of God's Kingdom then we should not long for the 'good olde days' of the early church:

Think about it this way: With two new covenant children in our midst we are reminded again of the glory and wonder of nursing mothers. The closeness and intimacy of this blessing and the wonder of how the mother's milk is produced and nourishes the young child as they experience the most rapid growth and development they will see in their entire life.

BUT imagine how we would cringe if we saw an eight or nine year old child trying to access their mother's breast for comfort and nourishment?

- What is a blessing and wonder at one point is a shock and disappointment at another.

Just as we saw God tell Joshua to get up off his face when praying about the defeat at Ai, I suspect He would say the same about many of the ways that we pray for the Spirit to help us today.

If the Bible teaches that the Spirit came to glorify the Son and fill the earth with His Kingdom...

And if history shows that He has been doing this for some two thousand years...

- Then it is pretty insulting to ask Him to give us some little miracles or gifts to make us feel special like those early Saints!

The second lesson comes as a grave warning for those of us in the American Church today...

Again, we need the perspective of proper history:

Luke tells us that many feared the Church and many respected the Church. Many came to be healed of diseases and demons but not out of real faith: We are still seeing those crowds coming for the show.

- And come for the show they did wanting even a touch of the shadow of Peter for a healing...

The shadow of Peter...

Not Jesus, not the real power of the Gospel for real life but just the touch of a shadow to solve what they saw as a big problem in the short term.

- But looking back in time, we know that the warnings that Jesus gave the people of Jerusalem would soon come to pass...

The entire city would be destroyed, not one stone would be left in the Temple, and thousands upon thousands would die horrible deaths. They would need more than the shadow of Peter to escape that fate... They would need real repentance and a turning to Jesus for new life. Then they would join with the other Saints in heeding the warnings of Jesus and flee the coming destruction.

We as Americans, like the nation of Israel in that day, made a covenant as a nation with the Triune God who rules heaven and earth. We have seen blessings poured out on our nation as a result that have spilled over into almost all the world.

- And yet, just like Israel we have long forgotten this covenant and now believe that we are blessed because of our great works, even our religious works!

We continue to be blessed in many ways, and still function on the basis of much of the Biblical wisdom that we once knew so well... *What Francis Schaeffer called borrowed capital*

**BUT** this is really living in the shadow of the great men and women of faith who have gone before.

- Jesus does not want us to walk in their shadow, He wants us to walk in His light!

Just as we saw Paul point to many of the failings of the Saints in the Old Testament as examples for us, we can also learn from these early days of the Church. Those who had not repented went on living the good life in God's special city, enjoying the occasional miracle cast by Peter's shadow, but it would not last for long...

- The Day of Reckoning was coming just as Jesus promised and it is no different for us today.

Yes we as a nation enjoy many of the blessings and fruits from the labors of those who have gone before us, but this cannot last for long.

Jesus calls us to repentance: Jesus calls us back to His story of salvation where we can know the forgiveness of our sins, be joined together in the Body of Christ with our brothers and sisters and be filled with the Power of the Holy Spirit so He can use us as He chooses to advance the Kingdom of Jesus...

- Anything less is just living in the shadows!

**Communion Meditation: Revelation 22:**

**"1 And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."**