

The Loosing of the Holy Spirit

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This morning, you and I have made a declaration. We've made a declaration that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, he is the foundation, he is the primary piece of structure for our lives. Now we make that statement but I've got a confession to make: that song and I was singing at the top of my lungs, I'm just grateful they didn't have the mic on when I was singing, but I was singing, you know that we only declared half of that verse. The psalmist said that the Messiah would be the cornerstone to those who believe and the stumblingblock to those who would not. You see, we all have a decision to make today. We can build our lives on the cornerstone of Christ Jesus or we can allow his truth, his life, his death, and his resurrection, to be that which we stumble over because we refuse to believe. Jesus made it a little bit more clear in the Gospels, he said, "Here it is, you can build your life on the Rock that is me, or on the shifting sand." The storms are going to come. He never said they might come, he said they're going to come and the question is: do we have a cornerstone or do we have a stumblingblock? The decision is yours.

Let's pray.

Lord, as we come to this time, thank you for the privilege, thank you for the honor of declaring who you are not just in our mind but who you've declared that you are, that you are a cornerstone, you are a foundation and you are a rock but, God, we pray because we know there are those among us, we know there are those on the other side of the cameras, they're struggling, not just struggling with the problems of life and the issues of life, but they're struggling with having you be the cornerstone in their life. So God, I pray that today you would no longer be a stumblingblock but you would become their cornerstone, and for those of us who have you as our Rock, God, I pray that you will continue this day to build an unbelievable structure on that foundation as we trust your word, as we study your word and, Lord, help us to leave this place and apply your word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 27. As you're turning to Acts 27, if you're a guest or visitor with us today, we have been all this summer season, we have been walking through primarily the book of Acts but other passages in the New Testament, and we have been talking about, we have been studying, we have been addressing the person, the role and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We looked at everything from the fruits of the Spirit, to being filled with the Spirit.

We've even addressed what does it mean to grieve or quench the Spirit. We've talked about having boldness in the Spirit, but today as we come to the very last of this study in Acts 27, we have a picture of what does it mean to loose the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Now I want to make a very important point of clarification before we begin. When I speak about loosing the Holy Spirit, it doesn't mean that somehow, some way, you are hindering God from being God. It doesn't mean that somehow God is waiting and saying, "Well, until you give me permission, then I'll do something." No, when we talk about loosing the Holy Spirit, what we see in Acts 27, what we see in just a moment in our lives collectively, is that we see that God has incredible, abundant plans and purpose for our life that cannot go forth until we remove an obstruction that is in our life, and therefore loose the ability for him to do as he's already planned and structured in our lives. Today is not about somehow giving the Lord power in our lives, but removing the obstruction in our own lives so his purpose and his plan could go forth, and what we're going to discover today is that no matter what you believe or think, God's got greater plans for you than you can imagine. No matter what we could dream about today, he's got greater endeavors for us than we could ever dream of.

So today in Acts 27, we're going to look at one of my favorite stories from the life of Paul. We're going to walk through it real quickly and then we're going to come back and address a very specific subject matter in our local body's life, our local family of faith, and I want us to see this individually as well as corporately. It begins here in Acts 27 with this possibility and here's what I'm saying: the Apostle Paul has been put on a boat. He's been put on a boat primarily of prisoners headed toward his final destination. The Lord has told him where he is headed. Not only will he write some of the last letters of the Apostle Paul that we know of in the New Testament, but this is where he will lose his life. The Lord has told him, "This is where you're headed. This is your final destination." But in verse 4 we see the possibility. It says,

4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

What you see happen in the next few verses is that because of the path of the ship, because of the direction that it was going, there were some contrary winds and the possibility is that they will not reach their destination, they will not arrive where the Lord has said that this boat will arrive so much so that when you get to verses 9 through 11, that the captain of the ship, Paul speaks up and says, "Hey, I've got news for you. We're going to this destination. Listen to my voice and I promise you it's going to go a lot smoother." He wouldn't listen to him and so the ship got all turned around, it got taken into the bank, all kinds of things taking place, and so the possibility was that things could go much to the negative, but what we see in this chapter is that God provided. He provided a person in the name of Paul. He provided a path on this way to their eventual destination and with his provision, let them see that there was a better way.

Notice what it says in verse 21,

21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

So even in the midst of the possibility that things could have gone horribly wrong, God gave the Lord provision through the person of Paul and those that were on the ship and those that were the leaders of the ship, they finally listened to him, but before the ship could sail, before they could eventually go to where the Lord had provided for them, there was a very strategic preparation that had to take place. Look at verse 29, it says,

29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern [I want you to notice that last statement], and wished for the day.

Let me tell you what's happening here. There is a boat that's headed to a certain location. There is contrary winds. There is bad decision-making on parts of those that were a part of it. Then the Apostle Paul speaks up and says, "God's got a bigger plan for this boat than you could ever imagine. If you will just listen to me, we'll get there." They begin to prepare the boat but the preparation that Paul gives them, the instruction is, "We don't need to take off tonight, we need to drop some anchors right here," notice what he said, "and wait for the day." In other words, their eventual destination, their eventual journey not involved the possibilities of the negative, the provision of God, but the preparation for the future.

Now this is a story that can be applicable to every single aspect of our lives today, but I want to take this story and I want to apply it to us as a family of faith collectively. What I want to address specifically today is this: that you and I as a family of faith here in Opelika, we have an incredible opportunity of God, we have an incredible path, we have an incredible direction. I believe with all of my heart that God's plans for us collectively for the days ahead are greater than even the things that we've witnessed in days past. But you and I, we need to look at this chapter in Acts 27 and see how we got to where we are and then learn where or how we need to prepare for the days ahead.

So I want to look at this collectively by beginning by this: I want us just for a brief moment, we need to celebrate our past. What you know as this body of believers didn't happen overnight. In fact, you and I are riding on the shoulders of men and women of faith that stretch all the way back to 1859. It was in that year that a group of believers decided that in this place and in this strategic location there should be a body of believers not only to study the word of God, to worship the Lord, but to begin to send out others with the Gospel message to the entire world. I think we can all agree that over those years up to today, there's been some contrary winds, have there not? There have been some

things that have happened in the culture, there's been some things that have happened in the world around us that were such of a negative nature, I dare say there have been times in times past where people thought about giving up, giving in and giving out and saying, "It's just tough." So there was the possibility throughout all of these years that we would have never made it to this place but God provided his provision, for there were those men and there were those women throughout all of our history who have stood up and said, "Do you know what? God still has a plan for us. God still has a purpose for us. God still desires to move mightily among us," and they believed it with their whole heart.

So throughout all that time, though there was the possibility of the contrary winds, there was the provision of God that what he started here, he would complete until the time of Christ Jesus, which leads to the preparation. I want you to notice verse 29. A little over 10 years ago, the men and women, the people of faith at First Baptist Opelika decided to do what verse 29 talks about. Notice what it says: they dropped the anchors. They went through a time period, they went through a season where they allowed preparation to take place for future ministry. In other words, we as a family of faith said we believe the future is coming, we believe like that last statement, that the day is coming where we will expand our territory, where we will minister to more folks, but before we do that, we've got to put down some anchors.

So back in the year 2005, the people at First Baptist Opelika started putting down some anchors in this community. You may not even be aware of some of the things that have taken place so allow me to walk you through just a little bit of this. If you're seated here this morning and if you're in my far right or my far left, you'd be pressed for a seat 15 years ago because that part didn't exist in this building. They decided that we wanted to be a place where we could minister unto more people and so they took this fabulous facility and they expanded it out so that our capacity to minister, our capacity to teach the word of God would be double in its physical seating capacity. You and I right now are sitting as a part of that preparation.

Across the street with what we know as our education and our office structure, there's also on the backside an area we call the Well. For those of you who have teenagers like I do, that's where they spend a lot of their time on this campus. That is for our student ministry and on any given Wednesday night during the school year in excess of 250 and 300 students are back in that Well. On events of outreach nature, we'll have up to 500 students back there not only learning from the word of God but reaching out to our community and to those around them.

They put down some anchors and they said, "We need this place to be a little big bigger. We need a place specifically for our students." Then they took what we now know as the 316 Center they worked a modern day miracle. Those of you who are long timers here, what you know as the 316 Center, do you know that that used to be a gym that people roller skated in? Now that's another message for another day. I don't know about Baptists on skates but nonetheless, beginning next Sunday when the local colleges and universities are in full-force, they'll be over 500 college students down in that room during the 11:00 hour.

So in this place we have the capacity we have today because they prepared and dropped an anchor. Our students can come to this campus and be ministered to in an amazing capacity because of that anchor. Our college students, we're able to reach those who are doing their studies now in an unbelievable capacity, and just a few years ago in the midst of finalizing and finishing all that, the preparation went up a notch. I know many of you in this service particularly are familiar that we now have what I believe is one of the finest preschools and children's ministry areas in all of the world.

So on this campus alone, beginning in 2005, there were some anchors that were dropped, there was some stability. In other words, they said, "We need to get this place in such of a fashion that when the day is ready, when the day comes, when the day arrives, we want to make sure that we have everything in place to minister to anybody who comes to this place and then send them out of this place to minister from this place." There were some anchors that were dropped and what I want to speak to you today is not so much celebrating those anchors that were dropped but I want to look to the future. What would it look like if verse 40 were to take place in our lives? I want you to look down to verse 40, one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible. It says,

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

When I talk about the future possibilities, when we talk about loosing the Spirit of God in our lives, you do realize, and I know this is somewhat obvious, that all of that preparation and all those anchors and all those visions for ministry came at a monetary price. In fact, over the last 13+ years, all of that preparation, all of those anchors cost roughly about \$18 million. Now don't get me wrong, that's a lot of money, but do you realize that today as you and I sit in this place as we look to what are the days that are ahead, based on not only our regular contribution to our debt services but to those of you who have given above and beyond and to the strategic planning of our finance team and trustees and such, that on this date going forward there is only \$2.4 million left. That's it. What I want to talk to you today is this: what would it look like, what could it look like if we no longer had that debt service? What would the possibility be if we dropped the anchors? In other words, that which we have prepared for, that which we have been excited about, what would it look like in our lives, what would it look like in our church's life if all of a sudden we no longer were bound by that debt service? What would that look like for our families? What would that look like for our church? What would that look like for the mission and the ministry of the Gospel? So I just want to walk through verse 40 with you as a church collective and just look at the possibilities and look at the provision and look at the preparation for the future that the Lord has prepared and planned for us.

I mentioned it's roughly \$2.4 million. That equates today to \$729,000 per year in debt services. If nothing else happens, if nobody gives another dollar, if we never see another contribution in addition to our regular budget, this debt service will be accomplished and over in about four years. About four years. But what if that four years turned into four

months? What if that four years turned into four days? What if before this day the sun set, what if that \$2.4 million was eradicated? What would that look like? Now maybe you're here today and you individually or collectively or we as an entire family of faith and you're asking some questions about, "Okay, that's great and that's wonderful but what would it do?" A couple of questions I want to answer for you and the first one is this: how soon could that be eradicated? Well, as soon as the \$2.4 million is collected. It's gone. It's over. It no longer exists. The second question I would ask would be this: if that money was immediately available, how much would that save in interest over those four years? About \$500,000 in just future interest payments if nothing else is done in addition to. But the third question and the most important question I would ask would be this: if we eliminate the \$729,000 of current debt services, where are we going to repurpose? Where are we going to reallocate? Where are we going to redistribute those dollars because that's a part of our regular budget in addition to the excess giving that is taking place? So that's the question I want to address and it is my hope, it is my prayer that Acts 27:40 would come to fruition.

Now everything that I'm about to share with you, this isn't the first time it's been spoken. I've had the privilege over the last year of discussing with our staff, our trustees, our finance team, our deacons, all of our leadership entities here at the church, and so what I share with you, I come collectively on behalf of all of us, excited about the possibility of what God will do among us when this obstruction is relieved from us.

I want you to notice verse 40, what happens when they drop the anchors. The first thing they did is they committed themselves to the sea. Now this is strategic because the sea is bigger than them, it is more powerful than them. When they committed themselves to the sea, I want you to hear me, they said, quote, "We're not in charge. The water is. We're not going to dictate the path," because when they committed to the sea, you understand there is no rudder there, there is no means of it's left hand or right, they just said, "Let's drop it in the water and see where it goes." One of the means of repurposing this \$729,000 is taking about 1/3 of that every year, about \$250,000 and putting it in a separate ministry account called "Future Opportunities." You say, "What is that?" I don't have a clue yet and neither do you. In other words, we have no idea what the Lord has planned for us in the days ahead. We don't have a clue but don't you want to be ready when he reveals it? Don't you want to be ready when he says, "Hey, I've got a mission post here that needs to be established. I've got this here that needs to be started. I've got these folks that need to be assisted and need to be helped." The Bible says that his plans are so far greater than ours, we cannot imagine them. Can you imagine what will happen if we say, "Okay, God, we're going to set aside resources and whatever you ask of us, we're ready. We're going to commit ourselves to the sea and say, 'God, we're not in charge anymore. You are. You bring the vision and we'll ride it out with you.'"

So the first thing is we would commit ourselves to the sea. The second thing is this: we would loose the rubber bands. Now when I speak of the rubber bands, when you look at our family of faith, all a variety of ministries whether it be age-graded ministries, worship ministries, mission ministries, all those things, when I say loose the rubber bands, we would have the opportunity to take all those resources that are already being distributed

in so many different areas and, shall I say, give them a little more breathing room? Allow them to do and to be and to go a little bit more than they already are. I've got some news for you, and by the way, I like what I'm about to share with you. If you gave all of our ministry areas more resources, they do more ministry. They would love the opportunity to have those rubber bands loosed just a little bit more. So in other words, we would take about 1/3 of this debt service and under the direction of our finance team, we would just allocate it as it is needed among the ministry areas that are currently thriving in our present condition.

So we would commit ourselves to the sea saying, "God, we're going to set aside some things because we have no idea the plans you have for us but we're excited about them. We're going to take what we're already doing and we're going to expand them and make them even greater and more expansive in the days ahead." But it is the third piece that is the most exciting to me and that's hoisting the mainsail. Let me share with you what the mainsail or what should be the mainsail of any Bible-centered church: it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and telling an entire world how desperately they need him to be their Savior and to forgive them of their sins.

Now there's a word we oftentimes use to collectively mean all that and it is the word "missions." Missions takes place in our backyard and it takes place on the other side of the world, and whether you know it or not, you're a part of a very mission-minded family of faith. In fact, out of every dollar that is given, every dollar, 10 cents of that or 10% of it goes to a thing we call the cooperative program. You say, "What is that?" 47,000 Baptist churches all around North America collectively put the resources in and we have the ability to put thousands of individuals on the mission field. They're able to serve in places we can't even talk about and places around the corner. One of the ways that that giving takes place that you may see visually, anytime you see a natural disaster and you see the yellow jackets come out, that's Baptist Disaster Relief Services. Do you realize that we are the third largest disaster relief agency behind the Red Cross and the Salvation Army on the North American continent? You say, "How did those people get there so quick when the storms came?" It's because of our regular giving and that 10% piece. We're already giving them resources to go whenever the call comes.

So we right now are already giving 10% or a significant piece out the door for ministry. Here's what's important: ministry that's not even based in our local location. We're already giving 10% of it away. But in addition to that, we allocate another 3.75% or roughly \$218,000 a year towards strategic missions geared specifically from First Baptist Church of Opelika. Many of you have had the opportunity to serve in a missions capacity short term, long term, and you received financial assistance to do so. That's where that came from. There are families that are on the mission field right now that we are helping to support in addition to the 10%. This is how a couple of weeks ago we sent tens of thousands of Bibles to the Middle East to be distributed in their native tongue. You and I together did this with that 3.75% but if the anchors are loosed, sure we're going to set aside some resources for whatever God has and I'm excited about whatever it may be, sure we're going to take what we already have and we're going to loosen up a little bit, but the most exciting thing to me is we're going to take that missions budget and we're

going to double it overnight. That's right, we're going to go from \$218,000 to just shy of half a million dollars in strategic mission, not just giving but going.

Now let me put this in dollars for you because we understand that. That means that as soon as the anchors are cut loose, as soon as we no longer have this regular debt service, that means that just as a part of who we are as a family of faith, before we give to Lottie Moon, before we give to Annie Armstrong, before we give to any other "outside" or parachurch or connected ministry, that you and I would give in excess of 1 million dollars a year to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ somewhere other than this specific location. Now I don't know about you, but that gets me a little excited. Why does it excite me? Because once this anchor is removed, we get to commit ourselves to the sea. We get to loose some rubber bands and we have the opportunity to go further than we've ever gone. We have the privilege of going faster than we've ever gone.

Now, let me be honest with you this morning, what I've shared with you, this isn't an if, it's a when. It's going to happen. Now, at its longest tenure, it'll take four years. If nobody gives anything over and above and beyond in the next four years, in four years we can celebrate what I've talked to you about today, but wouldn't it be nice to celebrate it sooner than that? Wouldn't it be exciting to know that all these things we've shared aren't something that we're waiting for when my kid's finally out of college, but maybe not even have to wait for before what we know as Christmas arrives?

You see, one of the struggles, one of the problems that I think we as humanity have is that when we hear of God's plans, when we hear of his desires, when we hear of his paths in our lives, I think sometimes we struggle with the obedience. I want to give you a phrase today that's become very near and dear to my heart throughout the years: delayed obedience is disobedience. Now let me work that out very systematically here. Let's get off the whole debt thing for a moment. There are some of you here this morning that you've been struggling with belief for years. Some of you have been struggling with addiction for years. Some of you have been struggling with fear for years. And somehow, some way, you've said, "Well, it will eventually go away." Don't you want it gone today? Don't you want to experience that freedom today? Don't you want to experience that ability to be loosed from those things today? The Lord has said you can be set free. He said he came to set the captives free. He came to set addiction free. He came to set fear free. Folks, he's also come to set the anchors free as well.

So today it may or may not be connected to the specific topic that was addressed as a family of faith, but I think every single one of us has an issue, has a struggle, has something in our lives that we say, "Do you know what, God? I will eventually get to that and when I do, it'll be great but until then, we'll just keep on keeping on." In verse 40, what did they have to do first? They had to let loose the anchors. What's weighing you down? What's weighing us down? What's keeping you from the open seas? What's keeping you from the rubber bands being loosed? What's keeping you from the mainsail being hoisted? I've talked to you about what's keeping us collectively in one specific issue. Today is not just today of the big picture, today is also the day of your picture. The

Holy Spirit wants to be loosed in your life. What is it today that you need to have removed from your life to allow his plans to come to fruition in your life?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. As we come to our time of decision and response, you know, maybe you're that person today who says, "Do you know what? You're right. I've struggled with belief for years. You're right, I've struggled with fear for years. I've struggled with addiction for years. I've struggled with all these things." And it may be to the illustration today, it may be four years from now that that would be released, but wouldn't it be better if it was in four minutes? Wouldn't it be better if all that freedom and all that ability to yield to the Lord in your life wouldn't be an entire "time-span of a college education away" but just a few days, a few moments, a few hours? What is it today that needs to be released? What are the anchors that need to be let loose so that you could commit yourself to the sea of the Lord's direction in your life?

Lord, as we come to this time of decision, as we come to this opportunity where we have the ability to say yes to you and no to ourselves, help us, O God, not to hold on to the things of the past. Help us, O God, not to hold on to the fear of the future but help us, O God, to operate in power and in love and with a sound mind, allowing the anchors to be dropped so the journey can commence. Thank you, God, that you said it was a preparation for this day. This day is here, may we go forward in faith. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.