

Part 11: Want and Witness

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As my family has been trying to eat healthier, we've recently tried drinking raw milk. Now before you gasp, do you know what raw milk was called for almost all of human history? Milk.

Back in the 1800's there were a lot of unsanitary conditions for how they treated cows and how they handled milk. So instead of keeping bacteria from getting into milk, they used pasteurization to cook the bacteria out of the milk after the fact. But when a local farmer takes care of his cows and uses best practices, you can drink fresh milk that hasn't had any of the health benefits cooked out of it.

Now when you're excited about something, it's easy to want to tell others about it. When you've discovered the truth – when you've found something that's changed your life – you want to get the word out. You want others to experience what you've experienced and join in your joy.

But Patty and I don't want to be raw milk evangelists. To evangelize or to witness is to openly profess or advocate for something because you want others to convert and join you. Patty in particular can get really excited about the things she's learning about nutrition. But she doesn't want to be known for raw milk or for being a "crunchy mom." Those things are all fine and can be helpful – but they aren't enduring – they don't last – they don't have eternal significance. What we *do* want to be known for is Jesus. We want to openly profess - we want to advocate - we want people to be converted to Jesus. Not milk.

So recently, we went on a trip to visit family, most of whom are not believers. And Patty and I specifically went into the trip wanting to be witnesses for Christ. We didn't want something like milk distracting us away from just loving and sharing Jesus with people.

But one of our kids spilled the beans. And right away someone came up to us and was like, "you drink raw milk?" Conversation about nutrition was exciting and easy.

Talking about Jesus, on the other hand, didn't come so easy. It took prayer and discernment and effort. It was hard. And we only had a couple of actual gospel conversations. What made witnessing about Jesus so much harder?

Well in our passage today, Luke is going to encourage us to evangelize. He shares an account of how the apostles defy the religious leaders again. They boldly witness despite the danger. They even rejoice after being beaten. What would motivate them to do that? What do they want that makes them such bold witnesses?

So our main point today is this: What you want shapes your witness.

What you want shapes your witness.

How we relate to evangelism has everything to do with what we want.

And the word “want” can seem kind of trivial. But the desires of our hearts are really tied to what we believe will satisfy us. There are promises all around us of deliverance from bad things and promises to fulfill our longings. So behind what we desire is what we believe can save us. What we “want” tells us something about what we believe – what we put our hope in. And only in our hearts being reoriented will we have a different experience with evangelism.

So as we go through this passage, the encouragements to evangelize just keep stacking up. But we’re going to have to value what the apostles valued – we’re going to have to love what they loved – if we’re going to be motivated to witness like they did.

What you want shapes your witness.

And we’re going to look at this in three points:

1. Empowering Witness
2. Overcoming Witness
3. Enduring Witness

So let’s start with our first point: Empowering Witness

1. Empowering Witness

God miraculously grows the church (v.12-16)

Let’s read Acts 5:12-16:

¹²Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. ¹³None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, ¹⁵so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

The first thing that we see is a seeming paradox of fear and growth. In chapter 4, we saw an external threat from the religious leaders. They arrested Peter and John and threatened them not to speak. So that’s one reason to not want to be associated with the church. Then last time we saw a threat from within the church. God struck down Ananias and Sapphira after they tried to manipulate the church and use it for their own purposes. And so people were afraid. And yet despite this fear of being associated with the church, the people still have a high regard for them. And multitudes keep believing and becoming part of the church.

There’s been an ongoing theme of the church growing and God being the one who grows it. Previously, Luke used the phrase “the Lord added to their number.” And that emphasized that the Lord is the one who grows the church. And here he says believers were “added to the Lord.” Not only is the church growing, not only is the Lord the one growing it, but also, what unites all of us together is being joined to the Lord.

So what we're seeing here is that to belong to the community is to belong to the church. That's why if you're looking to get more involved here at Sovereign Hope, the next step is to become a member - to join with us in the faith. To learn more about that, you can attend our Church Essentials Seminar on September 8th. We'll look at how church membership is all about "believing together, belonging together, and becoming more Christlike together." Church membership is about being united together in the Lord.

So we see the church growing, and then we see that even people from the surrounding areas are starting to come to Jerusalem. They want to get close to Jesus' apostles. They have faith that this is where healing is found. And so lots of miracles are happening. But the main point is that news is spreading and the church is growing more than ever. This is miraculous growth. God is miraculously adding multitudes of people to the church.

Now we find miracles to be exciting, but we don't want to miss that conversion itself is the main miracle happening here.

Both my mom and my wife would say that there's no denying that God sovereignly saved them. They didn't grow up in Christian families. They weren't looking for Jesus. Nothing made them good candidates to be converted. My wife at one point even made fun of the Christian girls at school who later shared the gospel with her. Both my mom and my wife were the only members of their families that heard the gospel and believed. It was miraculous.

I, on the other hand, don't know when I was converted. It might have been when I was very young. But I know it happened and that it was a miracle.

It's such an encouragement to know that God is the one who grows his church. He uses people, but the church is growing miraculously. Every conversion story is a miracle to be celebrated. The best part of member meetings is when we present candidates for membership and get to hear a short testimony of how God saved them. We add them to *our* number with a simple voice vote in affirmation that God has already miraculously added them to the Lord. And you'll get to hear a few of those testimonies soon at some baptisms that are coming up. A miracle is on display in every conversion.

So kids in the room, wouldn't you like to see a miracle? Well listen closely when people get baptized, because when they share how God saved them, they are describing a miracle. If your parents are Christians, then you should ask them at home how they got saved. And they'll tell you about a miracle.

God is miraculously growing his church.

But as God grows his church, so grows the opposition.

God miraculously enables witness (v.17-21a)

Let's read v.17-21:

¹⁷But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰"Go and stand in the temple

and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

The apostles have growing influence and power and numbers. And public opinion keeps going in their favor. And this gets the attention of the opposition. As God fills the church, the Jewish religious leaders are filled with jealousy. When they arrested Peter and John back in chapter 4, it said that they were “greatly annoyed.” But now their annoyance has turned to jealousy.

When someone annoys us, it’s not ultimately a problem in the other person. There’s something inside of *us* that is being provoked. And so this is a good reminder that when we’re getting annoyed, that’s meant to alert us to take a look at our own heart and realize that the problem has more to do with our wants than with them.

The problem in the religious leaders is that they want something that the apostles now have - attention, influence, and power. They are currently getting left in the dust by this upstart band of apostles. So this time they don’t just arrest Peter and John. They arrest *all* of the apostles. So the opposition is escalating.

But then God sends an angel and just overrules the opposition. The angel miraculously brings the apostles out of prison and tells them to go speak about Jesus.

Now it’s interesting that they aren’t freed and then sent to go back to do miracles. Instead they are freed to speak. In fact the verses we just read are the last time Luke mentions miracles of healing happening in Jerusalem. They are freed by a miracle not to *do* miracles but to miraculously proclaim a message. There’s a shift happening. God will build his church not first and foremost as people come to miracles but by people *going* and speaking “all the words of this Life.” God’s plan is miraculously going forward - but it is through miraculously-enabled witness.

Any time that we find ourselves evangelizing, we can be encouraged that it’s part of God’s plan. Most of our opportunities might seem pretty ordinary. But in reality, God is orchestrating every gospel conversation in accordance with his plan.

Right before we went on that trip that I mentioned earlier, my Dad was also going on a trip to see some family. And we talked about how we both wanted to share Jesus with family. When my dad got back, he shared how at the end of his trip, the Lord just opened a door for him and he got to share to a captive audience why Jesus means so much to him. I was so moved as he told the story because God did that. What a miraculous privilege we have that our Father in heaven orchestrates the cosmos so that we are in a particular place at a particular time to share the name of Christ.

Our witness is divinely enabled. When a door opens to share Jesus with someone, God did that.

God commands to speak (v.20-21a)

So God miraculously builds his church. He miraculously enables witness. But then we have a responsibility to *speak*.

God is doing everything in this passage. He provides the opportunity. He’s even the one who converts and saves. And yet, you are his ordained means to grow the church by speaking words.

Often it's not the *opportunity* that's lacking but our *willingness*. How many times have I said, "I think I just missed an opportunity." What makes asking someone about their faith so uncomfortable? We can have a harder time witnessing to a Missoulia than the apostles did disobeying the Sanhedrin.

Remember that their miraculous escape wasn't a promise of protection but empowerment for witness. And they seem to not hesitate to go right back to getting arrested again. So what do they value more than safety and escape?

We've seen that God is the one who grows the church, enables witness, and commands witness. So there's great encouragement and responsibility to talk about Jesus. But now we're going to see what motivates our witness. Because what you want shapes your witness.

And that brings us to our second point: Overcoming Witness

2. Overcoming Witness

God Overrules the Opposition (v.21b-26)

Let's read v.21b-26:

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.²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported,²³ "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside."²⁴ 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.²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

This section is full of irony. You have the list of the power brokers – the high priest, the Sadducees, the council, all the senate of the people of Israel. And they assemble together thinking that they're in control. They send for the prisoners. And then everything goes wrong.

First, they are ignorant. They have no idea that they are not even in possession of the prisoners they're supposed to examine. Then they are perplexed because there's no way the prisoners just vanished into thin air. But it's worse. Their prisoners are actually standing in the temple publicly teaching the people. The religious leaders' power has somehow been completely overruled.

This is particularly amusing because the Sadducees did not believe in angels, supernatural gifts, or the resurrection. Yet these apostles, who have undeniably done miracles, were just freed by an angel to preach about a resurrected Savior. To them, none of this should be possible.

And now we see that they are afraid. The officers go and arrest the apostles again. But they don't use force because they're afraid that the people might stone them. All "the senate of the people of Israel" are afraid of the very people they're supposed to rule because they recognize that public opinion is not in their favor.

The Opposition's Failure and Fear (irony) (v.27-28)

Now let's read v.27-28:

²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

So the high priest brings his accusations against them. The apostles had disobeyed them. And he's exasperated. He's confused as to how this could have happened. Despite the council's power and authority and threats, somehow they've completely failed. All Jerusalem is filled with this teaching. And then he adds "and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Notice that he still avoids using Jesus' name. He says "this name" and "this man's blood." He fears Jesus' name because it's the name of the man they murdered. And it's the name that all the people esteem. They're afraid that they will be held to account for what they've done. The name of Jesus is a threat to their reputation, power, and security.

But the more they grasp for what they want, the more perplexed and confused they get. They can't make sense of how the church is growing and how the apostles are still witnessing.

Jesus Leads a Witnessing Church (v.29-32)

And so now let's read the apostles' response in v.29-32:

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Now this is a very well-known quote: "we must obey God rather than men." And there's certainly a general principle here that scales to lots of different situations. But in the immediate context, they aren't trying to fight for rights or change the state. This isn't even an act of civil disobedience because this isn't a civil court. It's a religious court.

One commentator says this:

"The apostles hope for change, but the change they seek is faith and repentance, not freedom of speech. In fact, they apparently do not even need freedom to speak—they will continue to speak regardless, for an angel of the Lord has told them to do so. This is a matter of obedience to God."¹

And so their primary concern is to obey God by witnessing about Jesus. The Sanhedrin's *strict* command not to teach in Jesus' name is in direct conflict with God's command to speak "all the words of this Life." And so the apostles obey right then and there by witnessing to the very people who seek to silence them.

¹ James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, John–Acts, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 384.

And so they lay out the gospel with three acts of God: God raised Jesus, God exalted Jesus, and God gave the Holy Spirit.

First, God raised Jesus. The religious leaders are the very people who killed him – they are the ones guilty of a crime. But God overruled them by raising Jesus from the dead. Not even killing Jesus could stop God's plan – in fact, it only ended up accomplishing it.

Then God exalted Jesus as Leader and Savior. It's not the religious *leaders* who have authority but the resurrected savior who has *all* authority. If you follow a leader who could die and rise from the dead, then nothing can stop him. He leads his church, and his command trumps every other authority.

And lastly, God gave the Spirit to those who obey him. Everyone who has been given repentance and forgiveness of sins has also been given the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit points to Christ – he is Christ's witness. And so when you witness, that shows that the Spirit is with you – you have joined him in his work – and he is working through you.

Look at God's Trinitarian work to give us all of this. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all involved in saving us and leading us as witnesses for Christ.

Guilt and Getting

If you're someone who is considering Christianity or if you aren't sure if you're a Christian, then this is what Christianity is all about. God is holy. He has ultimate authority over you. But we are all guilty. Not unlike these religious leaders, we have all lived for our own agendas instead of God's. We promote self instead of worshipping God. We rely on ourselves instead of trusting him. And *our* sin put Jesus on the cross.

And yet, this very morning, the Holy Spirit through his Word is bearing witness to you - the gospel that was preached even to these religious leaders is the good news for you.

God gave up his Son, Jesus, to die for your sins and raised and exalted him as Lord and Savior so that you could be forgiven. And so you must repent. Renounce your trust in yourself, the myth of your self-sufficiency and independence and your craving for the praise of men. Renounce trusting in yourself as your own savior - your performance can never deliver a salvation that lasts.

Instead, humble yourself and turn to Jesus. If you do, then that means God has given you the gifts of repentance and forgiveness of sins and has given you his Spirit so that you are welcomed into his fellowship forever.

Now did you notice that the gospel starts with bad news. The bad news is necessary to be a true witness of Jesus. You don't need a savior unless you need saved. You have to recognize guilt if you're going to recognize grace. So we start with the bad news, but the bulk of Peter's message is everything Jesus came to *give* you. All who believe have been given a Savior and Lord, repentance and forgiveness of sins, and the very Holy Spirit of God. We can expect people to dislike our witness because they hate the bad news. But guilt is good when it points to grace. The cross condemns us, but the cross is where we get everything – because we get Jesus.

Valuing Christ in Evangelism

But it's scary to evangelize. It's scary to talk about sin. We might be tempted to water it down.

But there's a sharp contrast in our passage between the religious leaders' fear of man and the apostles' lack of fear. Without Jesus, you will fear man. Social pressure or the possibility of upsetting someone is enough to silence us.

This passage has caused me to question why starting evangelistic conversations often feels so burdensome to me. And I think it's because I'm afraid of rejection. One time I was trying to evangelize in a waiting room, and there was someone behind me making fun of me. Sometimes the person sitting next to me on an airplane puts earbuds in and seems to be sending a signal that they don't want to talk anymore. It's not persecution. But if we're tempted to put our hope in our performance and likeability and find our worth in other people's acceptance, then rejection can feel devastating. What could overcome those fears?

When I dropped my dad off at the airport, I told him that I was anxious about my upcoming visit with family. I wondered if I would be bold and share about Jesus. And he reminded me of 1 Cor. 13: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing."

What did I need to be a witness for Christ? I needed love. If I recognize Jesus' love for me then my motivation will be love for Jesus, and I'll want to speak of him. If my motivation is love for people, then my focus won't be on boldness itself or winning a debate - I'll want them to be added to Jesus, added to his church.

The apostles' relationship to their Leader and Savior – their relationship to his indwelling Spirit – that's what produced the witness. It's bold, but it's not bravado. The value of Christ shaped their witness.

And so there's a battle of wants in our passage. The apostles want to obey God. They want to witness because they already have everything in Jesus and they want others to hear and repent and share in their joy.

The wants of the religious leaders can't be satisfied. They'll never have enough. And in the end, what they trust in will fail them. But what the apostles want is shaped by what they've already been given. They've been given Christ, given repentance and forgiveness of sins, given the Holy Spirit. They want to obey from what they've already been given. It is from fullness that they obey as witnesses. What you want is shaped by what you believe you already have. If you already have all of this, then you will want your life to be a witness for him.

Do you want that? Spirit-empowered witness is what the church does. We can speak boldly not because we're guaranteed we won't suffer but because all we've already been given gives us resurrection-powered confidence that God will grow his church. And what a comfort that our witness cannot ultimately fail.

Now that doesn't guarantee that the gospel always gets a favorable response. We'll see that in our final point: Enduring Witness.

3. Enduring Witness

God's Plan Endures (v.33-39)

Let's read v.33:

³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

So the apostles' witness does not get a favorable response. What the leaders value is irreconcilable with the gospel. So they are enraged and want to kill them.

And yet, this is not a failure. These are God's apostles with his Holy Spirit in them – and even *they* get rejected. People failing to respond to the gospel is no indication of a failure to faithfully share the gospel. God's plan is in no way hindered even though the lack of results in the moment might make it look that way.

This is an encouragement to me. One of the things I wrestle with in evangelism is the fear that I'm going to *do* it wrong. When is the right time? Which questions do I ask? What passage do I use?

A couple of Jehovah's Witnesses came up to me when I was doing yard work. And we talked for probably an hour. I asked a lot of questions to try to personally understand them. In the end, I pointed out that they emphasized good morals and a way of living - but in Galatians 1 Paul calls teaching that adds requirements to the gospel "no gospel at all." I pointed out that they excommunicate people from their church over attending birthday parties. They've created a man-made law people have to follow in order to be truly acceptable to God. In doing so they are aligning themselves with false teaching and no gospel at all. One of the gentlemen got visibly irritated before they left. I went in the house so saddened and disheartened. Maybe I should have asked them about what they believe Christ accomplished in his death. Maybe I should have made a case for the Trinity or Jesus' divinity. Or maybe my role was just to put a pebble in their shoe – you know, introduce a nagging thought that maybe something they've been taught isn't true. Or maybe it was for my kids who saw the interaction from the window. They're my primary evangelizing relationships. When I came in the house and explained what happened and how I cared about those men and wanted them to know Jesus, I was evangelizing my kids. In the end, we have the Spirit in us, we love Jesus and love people and try to witness – and we know his plan will succeed and somehow even our bumbling efforts are a part of that plan.

If God provides the opportunity, then you're the right person. God's the one who saves people. It's just our job to speak. So learning and growing in understanding how you can share the gospel is good and helpful. But if you've been saved then you have everything you need to share Jesus in that moment. And we trust God with the outcome.

Now surprisingly in our passage, the council makes an unexpected decision that is both *wise* and *ironic*.

Let's read v.34-39:

³⁴But 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. ³⁵And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶For 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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;³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice,

Gamaliel makes the point that men often claim to be something and try to gain followings but they perish and their plans come to nothing. He’s not convinced that the church is God’s plan. So he equates the church with these other followings of men. He recommends that they leave the church alone and it will probably die out on its own.

Now there’s some irony in the wording of this section. He says that Theudas “rose up” and Judas the Galilean “rose up” and their plans failed. But Luke used the same word in v.17 to say that the high priest “rose up” when he put the apostles in prison. Even Gamaliel “rose up” to make his speech. All of those who rise up of their own accord fail. But the Christ who God raised and exalted cannot fail.

Gamaliel warns that they *might* be found opposing God. But earlier they couldn’t *find* the men in prison because the religious leaders are *already* found opposing God.

So ironically, Gamaliel is giving a commentary on what’s been happening all along in this passage. Men rise up thinking they are something and their plans fail but God’s plans won’t fail. Gamaliel just doesn’t realize that the failing plans of man are the religious leaders’ plans – and that the plan of God that will not fail is the church.

What are you devoted to building in your life? What do you think will endure? In the end, man’s applause won’t last, our stuff won’t last, the benefits of raw milk won’t last. You might labor for good things – giving your kids experiences or building a business. But do you labor for what will endure forever? You have been invited into the plan of God to build his church, and it will not fail. What will you give your life to?

When you value Christ above all else and share his desire to see the salvation of his church then you will value being a witness for his name.

But now, there’s an escalation in opposition. And yet, the results are far from what the council expected.

God's plan gives us reason to joyfully endure (v.40-41)

Let’s read v.40-41:

⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

So they take Gamaliel’s advice – sort of. They add on a beating for a little extra security.

God's plan won't fail. But his plan involves his witnesses suffering.

And we don't like that. When we suffer, that feels like something went wrong. It's an interruption to our plans. But it's never an interruption to God's. When we suffer we can know that this is not some random meaningless tragedy. Somehow despite all the brokenness and evil that surrounds it, this is the very place that God has ordained to meet us.

And this beating produces a surprising emotion. They rejoice. This is the first mention in this passage of the apostles' emotions. But we've seen a lot of emotion from the opposition. They were jealous in v.17, greatly perplexed in v.24, afraid in v.26, and enraged in v.33. In their self-reliant pursuit of their own plan, they've had a lot of negative emotions. In total contrast to that, the apostles are *beaten* and rejoice. What you value is behind what you feel. Our desires are behind our emotional responses. So what do the apostles value that would make them feel joy after being beaten?

It says they rejoiced that, "they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."

What do they most want? To worship Jesus. To exalt the name of Jesus. Christ is so precious to them that it is an honor for God's plan to include them suffering for his sake. The suffering in itself isn't good – they don't want to experience pain for pain's sake. But their suffering and still treasuring Christ confirms that they value him more than security, control, or the approval of man. It confirms this place is not their home. They are living for the name of Jesus come what may.

The very experience that we might fear happening to us is overcome by the experience of the apostles here. They have real joy despite what we fear coming true because Christ is sweet to them in the midst of suffering.

There's something more important in this passage than physical healing or avoiding suffering. Everyone that was healed earlier in the passage eventually died. The focus of Christianity isn't that you get healed and spared suffering in this life. We're not home yet. The focus is on gospel witness calling others to Jesus. Your response to Jesus in the midst of suffering says more about the value of Christ than when your physical problems are healed. You don't have to be a Christian to get excited about not having pain anymore. But to suffer as you are faithful to the Lord in your trials and to count Jesus' name better than life - that can't be explained except to say Jesus must really be of more value than anything else. Loving him and wanting to follow him and be a witness for him turns even suffering for him into a privilege.

This reminds me of the hymn, "All the Way My Savior Leads Me." The first verse goes like this:

*All the way my Savior leads me—
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy,
Who through life has been my guide?
Heav'nly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well;*

*For I know, whate'er befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well.²*

God's plan endures. God's plan gives us reason to joyfully endure. And God's plan endures through our faithful witness.

God's plan endures through faithful witness (v.42)

Let's read v.42:

⁴²And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

As opposition escalates, so too does faithful witness and the growth of the church. The apostles' suffering for Christ leaves them just wanting to participate in the gospel advancing even more.

What about you?

You know, I am so encouraged and amazed by the evangelism stories I've heard from members of this church. There's a couple who have only been believers for a couple years, and yet they find themselves in gospel conversations with neighbors, and coworkers, and clients all the time. There are college students who have intentionally met with other students specifically to share the gospel with them. There's a great-grandma who tries to tell her great-grandkids about Jesus when they come and stay with her. There's someone who started coming to church, got baptized and became a member all because another member just decided to mow their lawn and invited them to church. There's a gospel conversation that happened over a shopping cart in the Walmart parking lot. There are teachers sharing the promises they cling to with their students. And there are parents who daily, repeatedly point their children to the gospel in discipline, and family devotions, and giving counsel to adult children - praying that God would grant their greatest desire that their kids would be saved.

When we treasure Christ and see our place in God's unstoppable plan to build his church, that frees us up to joyfully endure as we participate in gospel witness.

Now a sermon like this can make us feel a lot of guilt over our performance in evangelism. But I hope you're encouraged to see all that God has already freely given us. Don't dwell on your failings. Stare harder at his love. And then motivated by love – when you think the Lord is providing an opportunity - speak of him. Then despite all your shortcomings, you can know it was exactly what the Lord ordained. God's plan to grow the church is advancing, and you are a part of that plan.

One final note is that this passage takes place at a unique moment in the history of the church. The church is on the cusp of going out. Right now people are coming *to* Jerusalem. But soon in chapter 8 persecution will start scattering believers out - eventually to all the nations. What they are doing locally in Jerusalem has to go out globally to all the earth.

So thinking of our own church and this moment in the life of *this* church – are we preparing to be a part of the gospel going out? In all my time here, we've never had a long-term missionary that we've

² All the Way My Savior Leads Me by Fanny Crosby

raised up and sent out of this church. We support missionaries that other churches have raised up and sent out. But we won't be a church that sends out missionaries if we aren't a church that is practicing these things right here, right now.

I want to encourage you that as you grow in your love for Christ, his church, and the lost – this isn't only what it looks like to be a healthy church or a Missoula church but it's also what it looks like to be a sending church. Practice participation in the life of the church, evangelism, and discipleship here and now. And pray that God would raise up some from our midst that we can send to the nations. Humbly pray whether God might grow that desire in you. God will miraculously grow his church. We can confidently participate in his plan through his Spirit in our gospel witness. And we can joyfully endure for his sake whatever he ordains because it's an honor if it's for his name.