**COUNTED WORTHY OF SUFFERING FOR JESUS**

June 19, 2016

Acts 5:17-42

Key verse 5:41 “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

In the last passage, we learned that the church is the household of the living God. It is not a human fellowship. So we must come to church to worship the living God, not for personal benefit. Then God’s grace will be powerfully at work. Barnabas was an exemplary person full of the giving spirit. And he was known as son of encouragement. As we go through the journey of life, many of us will face problems such as homework, jobs and struggling in our Bible studies. We need a lot of encouragement. Will you live as sons and daughters of encouragement like Barnabas? We should name our sons Barnabas and call him Barney. In today’s passage the apostles are again confronted by persecution from the Jewish religious leaders. God does not tell them to retreat, but to advance by faith and give the full message of new life to perishing people. When they obeyed, God worked with them through his angel and the Holy Spirit to defeat the power of darkness and advance the gospel. This required the apostles to suffer. But they emerged more joyful and victorious than ever. They were joyful because they were counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus. This shows that believing in Jesus will not exempt us from suffering, but it is worth it.

I. Go and tell the message (17-20)

In the previous passage, we learned that the work of God advanced so powerfully that thousands of people believed. And the sick people were healed and those who were tormented by evil spirits were cured. The work of God was so powerful that some people brought the sick into the street and laid them on the mat, waiting for Peter to pass by, because they believed that Peter’s shadow might heal them. It was exciting and powerful work of God. We must praise God for such wonderful work. Let us look at how the religious leaders felt about it. Look at verses 17-18. “Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.” They should have been filled with joy, but strangely they were filled with jealousy! When the thousands of people followed the ordinary, unschooled apostles with great respect, they felt jealous of them so they wanted to stop the work of God. They arrested the apostles and put them in public jail. Unless we guard our hearts, we too can be filled with jealousy and become hindrance to God when others’ work prospers.

How did God protect the apostles? Let’s read verses 19-20. “But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people all about this new life.’” The religious leaders worked hard to stop the apostles, but God opened the doors of the jail and brought them out easily. There was no problem with God to release the apostles, though the apostles were locked tightly in jail and guarded securely. We should trust God because God can solve the problem so easily. Then what did God tell the apostles to do? Look at verse 20 again. “‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people all about this new life.’” Let’s think about what it means:

**First**, God told them to ‘go, stand in the temple courts.’ Perhaps the apostles did not want to go anywhere. They might want to go hiding like fugitives. Especially they did not want to go back to the temple courts where they had been arrested. But God told them to go and stand in the temple courts where people gathered and listened to the message. God wanted them to overcome the fear of men and take a stand in this temple courts. When we are rejected by students over and over, we don’t want to go to the campus again. But God said, “go and stand in the temple courts.” Probably the apostles wanted to go to Galilee where no religious leaders lived. Maybe that is why God told them to go specifically to the temple courts. Why did God tell them to go and stand in the dangerous place? God wanted them to overcome the fear of men. God also wanted to display his power in the middle of the enemy camp. If they avoided there, God could not demonstrate that he is the living God.

Campus is our temple courts where students stay and study. Sometimes it is hard to move our feet and go after many rejections. We make many excuses, “I will get rejected. No students will respond. I am tired.” When we are obedient to God and go, God might have prepared a sheep for us. When we don’t move our feet and go to campus, we might miss the one prepared for us. When we move our feet and go, God says, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!” Unless we tell the message, people would not know the savior. Faith comes from hearing the word of God. Unless we tell the message, no one would be saved.

**Second**, God wants us to tell about the new life. The message of new life is very simple. Until now, we learned about Peter’s message 3 times. What did he say? Basically every time he preached the same message. Jesus whom you crucified, but God raised him from the dead and made him Lord and Savior. There is no better message. There is no other messages. When they believed in this Jesus, they were filled with joy and with power because they were forgiven and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the message of new life. Jesus is the central message of the whole Bible – the Old Testament and New Testament. We need to tell this message of Jesus that brings new life. Jesus said: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk16: 15-16) It is truly a serious matter. Therefore God told the apostles to go, stand and tell the message. There is a sense of urgency in God’s command. I pray that we all go and tell the message of Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the angel referred to the Christian faith as this new life. Christianity is not just creed or set of doctrines, but a new life which the risen Jesus gives to all who trust in him.

II. We must obey God rather than men (21-42)

How did the apostles obey God’s command? Look at verse 21a. “At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.” They went to the temple courts at daybreak and taught the people. They were so obedient to God. Look at verses 21b through 26. When they could not find the apostles in the jail, the religious leaders were totally puzzled. Then someone told them that the apostles were preaching in the temple courts. The captain went there and brought the apostles in again. They did not use force. The apostles did come in voluntarily. The apostles were not afraid at all. Look at verses 27-28. “The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,’ he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

They threatened the apostles with their human authority, but the apostles were not scared. Why? Because they preached with God’s authority. Rather they used every opportunity to testify about Jesus. God used their persecution to proclaim that Jesus is Christ. Let’s read verses 29-31. “Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.’” Sometimes we think we don’t have time to witness. But look at the apostles. They used every event to witness about Jesus. They said: we must obey God rather than human beings. Though the religious leaders tried to stop them, the apostles were determined to obey God and witness. If we are willing to witness, we will see that opportunities are there always.

Look at verse 32. “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” When we witness about Jesus, the Holy Spirit also witnesses with us. This means we are coworkers with the Holy Spirit. When we tell about Jesus, the Holy Spirit will either convict the people or convert them, applying our message. How did the Holy Spirit convict the religious leaders? Look at verse 33. “When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.” They were full of guilt. But how did God protect them? Look at verses 34-40. This time God used a man named Gamaliel to convince the religious leaders who want to kill the apostles. He was one of the distinguished of Israel’s rabbis and the teacher of Saul of Tarsus. Look at verses 38-40. “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God. His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.” Look at especially what he said, “…you will not be able to stop these men.” This was true. The gospel message and the power of the Holy Spirit could not be confined by a jail or stopped by persecution. The gospel is the truth of God. The Holy Spirit is the power of God. Nothing can stop the advance of the gospel. What really matters is the attitude of God’s servants toward his words, “Go, stand and tell the message of new life.” We must obey the command to preach the gospel and trust in God. Then God works with power through the Holy Spirit.

The apostles were beaten harshly and released. It must have been quite painful for the apostles. Did they complain to God? Look at verses 41-42. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” Are they totally out of mind? Are they insane? It says that they rejoiced because they were counted as worthy servants. It is a divine mystery. Suffering for the gospel did not make the apostles gloomy. It filled them with heavenly joy—spiritual joy that satisfies the soul. God recognized them as his precious and holy children in this sinsick world. While obeying God, if we suffer, our sufferings are the badge of honor. Therefore when we suffer, rejoice because we are considered as worthy servants.

Chiune Sugihara was a Japanese diplomat in Lithuania during World War II in 1939. At that time, Germany was about to invade Lithuania, and many Jews were desperate to leave. So obtaining a Japanese transit visa became a matter of life and death. Sugihara wired his government three times requesting to issue these visas, and all three times he was denied. Time was running out for the refugees, and Sugihara had a difficult decision to make. He knew he might be fired and disgraced if he defied government orders, but he also knew that he could not allow these people to die. When he struggled in prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke through verse 29, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” He decided to issue the visas on his own, risking his career and life. But his decision would jeopardize his family. He was OK for suffering, but he did not want his wife and children to suffer. So he asked his wife. Then his wife encouraged him to issue visas. For 29 days, he wrote and signed - 300 visas a day all written entirely by hand. He did not even pause for meals – his wife would prepare him sandwiches and leave them by his side. At the end of the day, she would massage his aching hands. With Sugihara’s visas, as many as 6,000 refugees were able to flee, making their way to Japan, China, and numerous other countries in safety. They had escaped the Holocaust, and would become known as Sugihara Survivors. In comparison, Schindler saved 1,200 Jews. When he came back to Japan, he was fired by Japanese government and in order to support his family, he had to work at the bottom of society, sometimes, selling light bulbs door to door. But he had no regrets. He was thankful that he was counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus Christ, and for saving many people.

In conclusion, when the apostles faced the persecution and sufferings, they never retreated. Rather they obeyed God more than ever, even if it means suffering and hardship because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus.