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God's Unstoppable Mission

ACTS 11:19-24

Introduction

1. You and I as Christians possess the greatest news this morning that mankind has ever heard or will ever hear.
2. It is the message of salvation, of a Savior who came into the world to bring us freedom from the bondage of sin, guilt and the death which accompanies it.
3. It is a message of strength — of a God, who . . .
 - a. “according to the riches of His glory” **strengthens us** “with power through His Spirit in [our] inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).
 - b. “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Ephesians 3:20).
4. It is a message of peace:
 - a. “Peace with God” **which we now have through** “our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).
 - b. “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension” **which guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 4:7).
5. It is a message of comfort, which the “God of all comfort” **provides for us** “in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3,4, ESV).
6. It is a message which God has given us the responsibility to share with the **entire world**: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved

shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

7. You may have noticed in our reading that Luke shares with us the continued growth of our Lord's church in spite of the persecution which began following the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.
 - a. He tells of those who made their way to the city of Antioch in Asia Minor and began "preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20).
 - b. He then writes these words, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21).
 - c. The next piece of information we are provided is of a man named Barnabas, who is sent by the church at Jerusalem, and began to encourage these new Christians in Antioch.
 - d. The result was that "considerable numbers were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24).
8. This is a constant theme, reiterated over and over again throughout the New Testament:
 - a. Though Satan seeks to stop our Lord in the building of His church.
 - b. Our Lord is seeing to it that souls are constantly obeying the gospel and being added to the family of the saved.
9. This morning, I want us to consider two things:
 - a. The efforts of the one who is against us.
 - b. The strength we receive by the One is for us.

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I. Facing The One Who Is Against Us

A. THE MANY FACES OF THE DEVIL

1. He is a liar (John 8:44b).
 - a. In John 8:44, Jesus said "there is no truth in him."
 - b. He then added, "Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44c).

- c. In Revelation 12:9, John wrote that he “deceives the whole world.”
- d. No one is exempt from his schemes.

2a

- 2. He is a “murderer” (John 8:44b).
 - a. “He was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44b).
 - b. He is the enemy of life.
 - c. Through his lies to Eve in the Garden, he brought spiritual and physical death to mankind (cf. Genesis 3:4).

2b

- 3. He is “the accuser of our brethren” (Revelation 12:9).
 - a. Because he doesn’t want us to receive God’s grace, he constantly accuses — “day and night” — us of our sins before God.
 - b. “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, one every said? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face” (Job 1:9-11, NASB95).

Slide 3**B. HIS EFFORTS TO STOP THE EARLY CHURCH**

- 1. Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus had promised His disciples that He would build His church and that “the gates of Hades would not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18).
- 2. On Pentecost, following Peter’s sermon, about 3,000 souls were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41).
- 3. Satan started his attack in earnest with the arrest of Peter and John after the healing of a lame man and the preaching of Peter’s second sermon (Acts 4:3).

3a

4. In Acts 5, we find the devil attacking our Lord's church from within through the deception of a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira. Their lie to the Holy Spirit resulted in their deaths (Acts 5:5,10).

3b

5. It wasn't long after that Satan influenced the high priest and those with him to arrest all the apostles and put them in jail (Acts 5:18).

3c

6. In Acts 6, we encounter an internal problem in which a complaint arose concerning those widows who "were being overlooked in the daily serving of food" (Acts 6:1).

3d

7. One of the men selected to meet this need, a man named Stephen, was stoned to death by those who did not like some of the things which he said (Acts 6:8-7:60).

3e

8. As a result of his death, "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem" causing all the disciples, "except the apostles" to be "scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1).

3f

9. It was at this time that a Pharisee named Saul made it his personal mission to eradicate every Christian he could find (Acts 8:3).
10. Satan used every opportunity to destroy the church both from within and without.

Slide 4**C. HIS EFFORTS TO STOP US TODAY**

1. His tactics still haven't changed.
2. He seeks to destroy our Lord's church both from without and within.
3. From without, He continues to physically attack the church.
 - a. In places like China, Africa, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, Christians find themselves in physical danger for their faith.

- b. Many worship God in secret, knowing that if they are discovered, their very lives are at stake.
- 4. From within, Satan works to . . .
 - a. Discourage us
 - 1) To Paul in Corinth: “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you . . .” (Acts 18:9-10).
 - 2) Paul told the brethren in Thessalonica to “encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

4a

- b. Deceive us
 - 1) In 1 Corinthians 15:33, Paul warned the brethren, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’”
 - 2) In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul shares his concern for those Christians in Corinth, that Satan would deceive them by his craftiness, and cause their minds to be led astray from their sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

4b

- c. Divide us

“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

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II. Strengthened By The One Who Is For Us

A. “I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

- 1. Toward the end of His ministry, at a place known as Caesarea Philippi, Jesus told His disciples that He would “build” His church and that “the gates

of Hades would not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18).

2. You don't have to read far in the book of Acts to see that Jesus kept His promise.
3. As I mentioned earlier, 3,000 souls were added to the church on the day that God poured out His Spirit on the apostles and Peter preached that first sermon.
4. As a matter of fact, in Acts 2:47, Luke records, "the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."
5. Following Peter and John's arrest in Acts 4, Luke adds in verse 4, "But many of those who heard the message believed; and the number of men came to be about five thousand" (Acts 4:4).

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6. In Acts 5, following the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira because of their lying to the Holy Spirit, we find these words "And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number" (Acts 5:14).
7. Then, after the arrest of the apostles for continuing to preach the gospel and their release, Luke writes, "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).
8. Though Satan attempted to create internal strife over the neglect of the feeding of the Grecian speaking widows, Luke records, in Acts 6:7, "The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7, NASB95)

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9. Did the stoning of Stephen bring an end to the growth of the Lord's church? No. Luke writes, "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

10. Remember Saul's efforts to destroy the church? Did it work? No. Jesus brought about his conversion. The result? "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase" (Acts 9:31).
11. What is my point? Simply this. No one and nothing can stop our Lord's mission to build His church, not a flood here in Waverly nor a war in Ukraine.

Slide 8**B. THE LORD CONTINUES TO BRING PEOPLE TO HIMSELF**

1. Ukraine
 - a. I spoke last evening with Daryl Willis who is with Eastern European Missions.
 - b. They print and distribute Bibles to Russia and the various countries which make up Eastern Europe, one of which is Ukraine.
 - c. When the previous president of Ukraine came to power in 2014, he noticed three school districts in the nation in which test scores were up and problems were down.
 - d. He asked the administrators of those districts the reason for the difference. They told him they were using the Bible as a textbook to teach moral character.
 - e. He authorized the same to be done for the other districts.
 - f. At present, three-fourths of all public schools in Ukraine use E.E.M. Bibles as textbooks for this purpose.
 - g. Daryl told me that Ukraine has become a kind of beacon for other nations.
 - h. Last year, E.E.M. distributed 1.5 million Bibles throughout Eastern Europe, its highest ever.
 - i. This year, before the conflict, they received requests for 2.4 million.
 - j. By the end of the first week of the conflict, all the Bibles E.E.M. had printed in the Russian and Ukrainian languages at its warehouse in Vienna, Austria were gone.

- k. There are continual requests for Bibles at the various refugee camps for both youth and adults.
- l. At present, E.E.M. has printed 257,000 Bibles in the Russian and Ukranian languages for the youth in those camps. Their goal is 800,000.
- m. This is Acts 8 all over again. Our Lord is increasing his church.

8a

2. Waverly

- a. I wish I had time to tell you all the stories of what I see God doing in this community through you.
- b. Tomorrow, March 21st is the seventh month anniversary of the flood.
- c. One person I encountered this past week, out in the community, praised you as a congregation for what you have been doing during that time.
- d. He said, "I want to commend you for what you are doing. Others have come and gone, but you have stayed with it the entire time."
- e. Our God is tearing down walls and opening doors.
- f. We are building friendships with people we have only seen in passing before.
- g. In the early days we were receiving a number of Thank You cards for the financial assistance which our elders were able to provide to our flood survivors.
- h. Now, those thank you's are given in person as we enter their newly restored house or rebuilt home and deliver furniture, bedding, appliances and other household items.
- i. On more than one occasion those words are spoken with tears in the eyes.
- j. Again and again, I see examples of our Lord building His church:
 - 1) Out of that which Satan intends for ill, our Lord brings good.
 - 2) Try as he might to destroy or at least slow down the spread of the gospel, our Lord continues to build His church and frustrate the devil at every turn.

Conclusion

1. I know that many of you who are working here day after day are tired.
2. I have often wondered how many times our Lord was Himself exhausted during His three years of ministry.
3. Please know that our Lord is committed to us and will see us through.

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4. The words from a hymn, written almost 250 years ago, remind us of that promise that the strength we are to receive.

**"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand."**

**"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"**

(How Firm A Foundation, 1787)