

GO, STAND, AND TELL THE MESSAGE

Acts 5:17-6:7 (key verse 5:20)

"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

Today's passage is the completion of the first part of what Jesus commanded the disciples, in Acts 1:8 we read, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem**, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And Luke 24:46-47, where Jesus says "He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem.**" Jerusalem was the hub of God's temple, a place where people went to pray and hear the word of God. The epi center of God's place where all the knowledge and teachings of God, the theology of the faith came from. It was from here in Jerusalem where many came to learn and receive spiritual revival. The message of this new life was to be preached beginning in Jerusalem, before the message could go to the ends of the world. In today's passage we are witnessing the climax of the disciples preaching in Jerusalem before they go out to the other regions. At the end of this passage we read that all people had heard the message of the new life and many disciples and priests were added to the believers. I pray we too may obey God's command and Go, stand and tell the message of this new life to others beginning at our campuses. May we learn God's heart who wants to save sinners from worthless life into a new life. Amen.

Look at verse 17, "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. As we learned last week from shd Desmond message, the passage closed by how the apostles were performing miraculous signs. People gathered from towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits and all of them were healed. The disciples were gaining much popularity, not only were they preaching about Jesus, they also demonstrated through miraculous signs that indeed Jesus was alive. So the religious leaders grew jealous. However, this was not some jealousy hidden in the hearts like the one we can hide from others, we read In verse 8 that they arrested the apostles and put them in public jail. However, something happened during the night, and angel of God opened the doors of the jail and they were made free. Lets all read verse 20 what the angel said, "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." This is something unexpected after you have just broken out of prison. What we expected to hear from the angel is, run away very fast, get away from Jerusalem as fast as you can. But now the angel command was, God stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life. Let us look at this command carefully. Firstly, Go, stand in the temple courts. This means that God wanted them to go stand and tell, three verbs or three actions. God wanted them to go to the place where God wants. God wants them to stand and speak out. They must go to the public place, stand and speak out so that all may hear the message plainly. The words, "stand and speak", really mean, stand to it, to live and even die by it. Secondly, tell the people the **full message** of this new life (1984 NIV), I know the 2011 NIV says, tell the people all about this new life. So what is the message of this new life, going back to Luke 24:46-47, He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and **repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem." the message of this new life is the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It is the good news message, that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sin no longer has a claim over our lives. Jesus took our sin upon himself and he gave us his righteousness upon us. Through what he has done we can repent and live a new life in Jesus. Jesus will come again as king and judge, at present moment Jesus has sent out the Holy Spirit to those who accept Him. All this happened according to scriptures. Whoever repents of their sins and believes will receive new life that this life is eternal. God wanted them to speak the full message. The disciples had just been released by an angel from prison, they knew they were in danger, they were under persecution and so it was easy to shrink back and water down the message in order to avoid unnecessary conflict with the religious leaders. However, as we shall see later on Peter served the message fully. Thirdly, God also speaks about this new life, this new life is eternal, we can live in it because it was made possible through Jesus death and resurrection. Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection. Their hope and vision is only focused in this world. They are trying so hard to hold on to worldly power, wealth and human reputation. They then burdened the people with their teachings, teachings which could never release the people from the power sin and death. Jesus is the good the world can ever experience, because of His death and resurrection he has brought good news of great joy. God wanted all people including the priest to accept the message, repent and be born again into a new life.

There is something else we can learn from this command from God. We can learn the heart of God. The command the disciples were given would actually place them in more trouble. The command would not make their lives comfortable. The religious leaders had warned them before not to teach in the name of Jesus which they disobeyed and ended up in prison. Now imagine what could happen to them if they now go to the heart of Jerusalem, to the very head quarters of the religious leaders. God is willing to sacrifice to proclaim the gospel to sinners. God sent his Son Jesus into this sinful and hostile world. Jesus suffered and died to save mankind from sin. Now God was sending his beloved disciples back to the temple courts at the risk of their lives. God's heart really goes out to sinners, he wants to save perishing souls no matter who they are. The disciples because of the Holy Spirit in them, knew God's heart and God's heart became their heart because of the Holy spirit. They were now willing to sacrifice to preach the message of this new life.

Moreover, the temple courts became the heated spiritual battle field. For obvious reasons, it is the place where people come to hear the word of God. Therefore same time became a place where Satan will attack most. Satan wants to cut off the life giving word of God from his people and so the temple becomes a battle ground. In Kuruman the Methodist church I grew up in is now divided, there are two groups that don't want to agree with each other, they now have two church services so that they may be able to use the Church building separately on Sundays. Satan was able to infiltrate and win the battle because they are not holding on the word of God sacrificially, so they may become one under God's word. And so I believe where the message of Christ is preached, there is also a battle field. There was Baptist preacher by the name of Charles Spurgeon, who was commonly known as the "Prince of Preachers". It is said that before he delivered his sermons he prayed so hard that his shirt under his arm pits dripped with water. He was in the battle field. God wanted the disciples to enter into this battle field at the temple courts by preaching the gospel.

How was the response of the disciples to 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 did not waste time but went straight to the temple courts to preach the full message of this new life. Those who heard the message and received it by faith, could repent and receive new life. The Lord was pleased. However couple of hours later when the chief priest and his associates called together the full assembly of the elders in order to interrogate the disciples, they found the prison empty even though the jail was securely locked with guards standing at the door, this had left them wondering what had happened [22b-24]. To their surprise they found the apostle teaching people at the temple courts. Who escapes from prison to go preach in a public place. This made religious leaders more furious, they reminded the apostles of their instructions, look at verse 28a, "We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name!". For the religious leaders situation had become worse, look at verse 28b "he said. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!" Because the apostle obeyed God's command, to go, stand and tell, Jerusalem was filled with Jesus teaching, the message of this new life. Who would have imagined, a city that prosecuted Jesus and well guarded under the leadership of the religious leaders. This very city was now filled with the full message of this new life. Indeed God never fails, because the apostles chose to obey God's command, God could use them greatly.

How did the apostles respond to the strict instruction not to teach in the name of Jesus? Look at verse 29, "Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" They chose to obey God rather than human beings; this means that they feared God more than they feared human beings. We do recall that Peter was a man who had denied Jesus Christ three times, when Jesus was being persecuted to death. At that time he was a man who had so much hope in this world and worldly power. So the fear of man was greater, however after witnessing the risen Jesus. He could accept the message of this new life newly and repent. He was no longer ruled by humanism or the fear of man, but would rather please God rather than man. God became his chief commander rather than himself or how he felt. Not only Peter but all the apostles placed their lives at risk in order to preach the message of this new life. For them it was a must that they obey God rather than conform to the fears of mankind. Let us look at Peter's determined heart message to the religious leaders.

Look at verse 30-32, The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” Unapologetically declared that it was God who exalted Jesus to his right hand side as Prince and savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sin. He delivered to them the full message of this new life. It was clear that all they had to do was to repent and accept Jesus as their lord and savior so their sin may be forgiven, in order that they may enter into a new life of faith. Even though they had killed Jesus the son of God, yet God’s heart and love for them was still for them to hear the message and repent so they may turn to God and live in the new life. Sadly, this made the religious leaders furious, and they even wanted to put them to death [33]. It was Gamaliel a teacher of the law who spoke with reason and took a neutral position. He said some wise words to the religious leaders, ultimately that, “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 yourself fighting against God” the religious leaders got persuaded by Gamaliel, flogged the disciples and let them go. Though the apostles got flogged or beaten up, they still rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. Look at verse 42, “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.” They did not only preach at the temple courts but even went house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. Meaning that Jesus is Lord and King of our lives, only through him will have our sins forgiven, only through him are the promises of God a yes. Jesus is the author of our faith and of our life, he is the reason and meaning of this life, the wisdom God’s scripture teaches. Through him we can have a complete new life, does not matter what life we are in now, but only if we can repent by accepting Jesus as lord and savior, then our sin will be forgiven and we will have a new life. This is the wonderful and good news from God, as some say, Jesus is our love letter from God, to have a new life.

I accepted the calling to be a shepherd for campus students, I think its been 11 or 12 years now. I think in my younger years I was passionate about preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, growing older I seem to have rusted and am becoming like an old furniture. You know as an academic, there is a saying that, if you do not publish you perish, meaning that you become an older furniture, soon you become irrelevant or have no impact. I am starting to feel that in my life. Jesus command has not changed since he left us with the Holy Spirit. He left us a commission, go make disciples of all nation baptizing them in the name of Jesus and lo I will be with you to the ends of the world. I became a shepherd from being moved by Jesus words, Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men. My life testimony centered around the sin of humanism. Because I tend to value man more than God, seeking to please man more than seeking to please God. Practical examples would be, seeking human praise as my life meaning or something that fulfills me greatly. So through bible studies I could be rebuked by God’s word, and realized that the only way for me to have new life, is to follow Jesus. I received so much grace from Jesus that all I need to do is to follow him, and he will turn me into a fisher of men. Today I am reminded of Jesus calling, to follow him and I can follow him by obeying his command. Today he is saying, Go, stand and tell in the temple courts and preach the full message of this new life. Today Jesus command is giving me another chance to grow as his disciple, to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and he will turn me into a fisher of men. The university campus is my temple courts. I pray that I may repent from the sin of humanism and fearing mankind, but that I may Go, stand and tell in the temple courts and share the full message of this new life. When the disciples obeyed Jesus, they could fill Jerusalem with the gospel message of Jesus. O Lord Jesus help me obey your command, help me not worry about my reputation or what people will say, may I simply come and follow you by obeying your command.

I have also lately been filled with complaints about our country, how load shedding could have been avoided if our politicians did not interfere with engineering matters, how the state of our country is just collapsing, things are starting to fall apart, our roads, education system, health, cost of living. Next month petrol prices increasing and paraffin which is used by mostly poor people will increase by R2. Gender based violence, now a man is becoming like a dangerous weapon against women in South Africa, as though he is gaining a new identity. Last week a student in the faculty of engineering was stabbed to death downtown in Johannesburg. Division among Churches is growing and gospel message diluted even used as business to make money. All these things makes a person feel hopeless and powerless. It is becoming impressed upon me more and more, I became to realize yet again how much hope I have placed in this world and people. And today’s passage is drawing me back to Jesus, and the truth of the message of this new life. That all these issues originate from the fundamental sin problem commonly manifesting itself as corruption and violence. Only Jesus message provides the solution to man’s fundamental

problem. Jesus is my savior king and I believe many campus student yearn or are graving to be released from the bondage of sin. I believe it is the heart of God for our young people on campus to hear the message of this new life. Lord Jesus may I Go, stand and tell like your disciples did, stand in the temple courts and preach the full message of this new life. May this be the purpose of my new life, I earnestly pray that I may follow you, so you may save me from placing my hopes in this world and goodness of people. May I go, stand and tell the full message of this new life.

As the number of disciples grew some issues also arose which are usually not intentional. The widows of the Hellenistic Jews were being overlooked in daily distribution of food [6:1]. The disciples designated 7 spiritually matured men to handle and resolve the daily distribution of food so that they do not neglect the ministry of prayer and of the word. We read in verse 7 that, "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." Though a practical challenge arose among the church, through wisdom they could resolve the matter while prioritizing on the preaching of the message of the new life. Because of their new life they could have their priorities right.

In conclusion, the disciples were released for a particular purpose. They were released so that they may go, stand in the temple courts and preach the full message of this new life. This was their new purpose in life, all of Jerusalem became filled with the message of this new life. From this passage we could see God's heart for lost souls. God would sacrifice his own for sinners to come to knowledge of the message of this new life. It is something not comfortable for the disciples to do, however because of what they witnessed, the risen Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, they could overcome human fear. They could overcome placing their hopes in this world and choosing to die for Jesus. Martin Luther king Junior once said, "If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." Today the Christian faith has grown in this world. However unfortunately, I believe our faith as the Christian church over years has become diluted. Europe came with the reformation, America used to send missionaries dedicated to the word of God, later it became Asia the dominant continent to send out missionaries. The third wave of missionaries was expected from Africa however that has not yet happened. And I believe Satan has been infiltrating the church, teaching false gospel, distorting what is marriage, and now lately the identity of a man and a woman. Today, the word of God is challenging all of us, "Go, stand and tell them the **full message of the new life**." God never fails, he wants to use us as his gospel workers, just like he used Peter and the other disciples, who were just like us, with weaknesses and strengths. However, it is a call to follow Jesus, to live a sacrificial life as Jesus did and leave our comfort zones, to go, stand and tell the full message. May God turn South Africa to be a harvest field for his kingdom, in Jesus name. Amen.