

The Wretchedness Of Unbelief.

Acts 5:21-33.

Sunday morning, November 8, 2009.

I. Unbelief is willfully blind and ignorant.

Willfully, because of the history of the Sanhedrin's struggle against the truth.

- A. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus had willfully been suppressed as they paid off the guards to lie about the Lord's resurrection.
- B. Willfully they ignored the eyewitness testimony as over 500 eyewitnesses had seen the Lord Jesus alive following His resurrection.
- C. Willfully they ignored the transformation in the lives of the apostles following the coming of the Holy Spirit.
 - From a cowardice disposition to a courageous one.
 - From being unlearned and untrained to being able to speak in front of large groups as well as court proceedings.
- D. They willfully ignored the many signs and wonders done by the apostles' hands, from the gift of languages to the healing of the lame man at the beautiful gate, to Peter's shadow passing over the sick in Jerusalem's streets, sending demons on the run, and resulting in healing for all. Ch. 5:15,16.
- E. Willfully, because of the miraculous escape of the apostles from prison the night before.
- F. Willfully because they wanted to pursue their own agenda at all cost. Before all else, and before anything else, their plans for themselves and their own wisdom had to prevail.

Application:

To counter the willfulness of their unbelief, and our unbelief, the gospel sets Jesus before us as:

- Risen from the dead; justly brought back from the dead by God Himself; God thus undoing the injustice perpetrated against Him in His crucifixion.
- Exalted to the place of God's own right hand; that is the place of His authority and power. "All power has been given unto Me..." Matt 28:17.
- Prince; the "Archehos." From "Arche," meaning the first, or the chief, as in Arch-bishop or Arch-enemy, and the verb "Ago," meaning, to lead, bring, drive, or induce. The Lord Jesus Christ has been made By God the main or chief leader, or simply the Head.

Conclusion: You can not be redeemed or reconciled or have your soul healed or saved by Christ, unless you give yourself up to be ruled by Him. Your willfulness must be broken, and whenever it raises its ugly head again it must be taken to be crucified with Christ.

Fellowship with Christ can only be experienced in the Spirit of humble submission.

II. Unbelief is fearfully blind and ignorant.

- A. It is secretly afraid of "what the outcome of these things will be." (vs. 24.) But no

matter how much it wonders or fears, it will bravely bring all such wondering and fear into subjection to its main objective in life, that being the maintaining of its own agenda. Its own wisdom and agenda are the altar before which all else

has to bow.

- B. They were afraid of the people lest they would be stoned. Vs. 26.
- C. When they had tried the Lord Jesus and had condemned Him to die, they revealed how they were afraid of the people, and also of the Romans, and how they were afraid of the disciples; they even were afraid of the dead Jesus, for they, unlike His disciples, remembered that He had spoken of His resurrection. So they put guards by His tomb.
- D. Unbelief's greatest fear is the loss of control and loss to its agenda. Such loss must be guarded against at all cost. All signs to the contrary must be suppressed in the interest of it. Reason itself must be made serviceable to it. Even hell itself and eternal judgment are acceptable risks in the face of maintaining it.

Application:

What does the gospel offer to these men, and to us, over against the tyranny of the fear of unbelief?

It offers to us Jesus Christ as Savior.

As Savior Jesus offers to us three things says our text:

1. He offers to us repentance. That is a change of mind; a change in our outlook. Maybe our own will and agenda are not the "Pearl of great price" after all. The pearl for which a man sold all that he had that he might have it. A pearl that will prove elusive in the end nonetheless.
2. He offers us forgiveness for our willful stubbornness. Reconciliation with the most holy God who we have offended with the idolatry of our own will and agenda.
3. He offers us the Holy Spirit. That is His own presence to guide and to teach us, and to transform us into His own image. The Holy spirit who translates our fears into the freedom of God's dear children.

III. Unbelief is always blame shifting.

Why are we in this mess; why are we left wondering what the outcome of these things will be; Why are we in the situation where we are afraid of the people. Why do we have this confrontation with these brazen and seemingly fearless apostles? The Sanhedrin tells us why, in our text: Vs. 28.

- A. The Apostles did not listen although the highest court in the land plainly had commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore. This was plainly their fault.
- B. Notwithstanding the good counsel they had been given, they not only had spoken in Jesus' name, but they had "filled Jerusalem with their doctrine."
- C. And as if that were not enough, they were laying the blame for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ at the doorstep of the Sanhedrin, as though they had done something wrong.

Application:

Over against this blame shifting the gospel offers us the grace of humility in owning and confessing our sin, and so finding the freedom of forgiveness through Christ.