

Sending God, Sent Church

Our Practice of Going

Acts 5:17-42

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. And well, ladies and gentlemen, we have officially come to the end of our sermon series, Sending God, Sent Church. If you remember we kicked it off two months ago with Larry McCrary teaching us about God's identity as a sending God, and thus our identity as his sent ones--*all* of us. This vision series has carried us through the most fundamental parts of who we are as a church, things we all should know. So I've got a little test for you this morning...

- Our mission: We _____ intentional _____ relationships to _____ Christ's _____ among the _____.
- Our five identities: E_____, F_____, D_____, W_____, B_____
- Our three practices: _____ing, _____ing, _____ing

Great job! Today we're going to conclude with our practice of going, going together with Jesus into his mission. Why is going one of our most basic practices as a church? Simply put, because God's in charge.¹ And that means he's in charge of everything that comes our way when we go with him: the opposition, the recognition, and the affliction. With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Today's passage is Acts 5:17-42. If you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs, you can find today's Scripture passage on page 913. Hear the word of the Lord:

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But 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.

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

¹ William J. Larkin, Jr., Acts, 98

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.

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.” **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.”

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. **34** But 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. **35** And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. **36** For 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, **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. **42** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. Acts 5:17-42

May the Word preached here today echo among the nations. You may be seated.

Exposition

You know, even if you’re new to Antioch, it’s no mystery--this church from the beginning has been all about going. I mean, our name is Antioch Church for cryin’ out loud! We

were planted in the epicenter of the most international part of Louisville. And we have nearly sent ourselves inside out with all the people who have moved on to make disciples and churches around the world. So this morning I think we need to begin a sermon on going by talking about...Hot Pockets.

What is a Hot Pocket you say? Funny you ask, because one of my favorite comedians believes it originated with someone in a marketing meeting who was like, "I got an idea! How about we fill a pop tart with nasty meat?"² And voila, Hot Pockets. Why would anyone ever eat a Hot Pocket? You know you're gonna pay for that greasy goodness with the indigestion that comes with it (especially as it gets lodged about right here).

Let's be honest, when you're part of a church that's all about evangelism and discipleship and church planting and sending, sometimes all that is gonna go down like a Hot Pocket. (end previous slide) You're going to be:

- Put in uncomfortable situations (like being asked to give sacrificially to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering)
- See friends sent away
- Become Satan's target practice because you're a threat to him
- And all the while fighting the constipation that comes from a heart that isn't always willing to be on the go with God 24/7

So why in the world would you *want* to be part of a church like this? Why not find a place that crafts a different take on God, one that's a little bit less demanding? Those who were closest to Jesus wrestled with a similar question in their day, and here's one of the instances of how they responded:

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Going is a declaration that God's in charge. That this church is *his* church. That our lives are *his* lives.

When Luke began writing his two-part account of Jesus Christ, his intention was to give readers certainty that Jesus is Lord--or in other words, that he's in charge.³ As we look

² Jim Gaffigan, Beyond the Pale, "Hot Pockets," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-i9GXbptog>

³ Luke 1:1-4

to today's story from Acts 5, Luke is doing this by showing that despite opposition God still carries out his mission through his church.⁴

Much like the story from Acts 4 that we considered a couple of weeks ago, God was doing “many signs and wonders” through the apostles, similar to Jesus’ early ministry. So people were responding more and more to the apostles’ preaching about Jesus.⁵ Then an upper class group of Jewish leaders called the Sadducees were hyperventilating with jealousy over this, especially because they had already told the apostles before to stop preaching in the name of Jesus.⁶ And no surprise, the apostles ended up back on trial again. But this time, it’s not just Peter and John who get arrested, but probably the entire group of apostles.⁷

In a world rebelling against God, confronting people with the announcement that God’s in charge *always* brings opposition.

I. God's in Charge of the Opposition

But here’s the thing (and this is our first stopping point), God’s in charge of the opposition. Over and over in this story we’re going to see an almost comical contrast between men who think they’re in charge and the God who’s actually in charge. We read beginning in verse 18 that the Sadducees

18 arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. [It’s like, ‘We’ll show you apostles! We’ll put you in prison openly for all to see and know who’s boss around here.’ But look what happens in verse 19...] **19 But 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. Acts 5:18-21** [It’s as though God responds, ‘I agree, let’s show *everyone* who silences and who speaks words of Life.’]⁸

This obviously wigs out the Sadducees and the temple police, but not in the way you might think. They don’t see a miracle, they see a threat. The text tells us they were

⁴ Larkin, 98

⁵ John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 113; Acts 5:12-16

⁶ Acts 4:18

⁷ Stott, 114

⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, 166

“greatly perplexed...wondering what this would come to” (v. 24). They were convinced the apostles were turning everyone against them.⁹ We read in verse 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. Acts 5:26

My, my, how the tables have turned! How ironic is it that ones who rejected Jesus the cornerstone,¹⁰ who are so eager to destroy the foundational rocks of the church, the apostles,¹¹ are now the ones afraid of being stoned themselves?! And as they should--the announcement that God's in charge says, 'fall on the Rock Jesus Christ or the Rock's gonna fall on you!¹² "Behold, now is the favorable time"¹³; "For [God] has set a day in which he will judge the world".¹⁴ I mean, listen to the apostles' message:

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. [Why? Because that's how you get in good with God--by being a good little obedient child who keeps all the rules? No! Because...] 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus [This changes everything! Jesus rising from the dead not only means he's in charge, it means he has the power to apply his obedience to you. This Jesus...], whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior [Why? Not to crush you, but...], 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." When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. Acts 5:29-32

How can these apostles stand and say such volatile, politically incorrect things? When you know that God isn't your opponent, and not just that he isn't against you but that he is pleased with you, that he's in charge and he looks at you and says, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased,"¹⁵ then you are free to obey God rather than obeying man, or in other words, you are freed from being a people-pleaser.¹⁶

Our constipation when it comes to talking about his offensive Son in the office or among relatives or at the park doesn't just come from our insecurities or busyness or lack of giftedness. It relates directly to what we are believing or failing to believe about God. Is he for you, not against you? Is he in charge?

⁹ Polhill, 167; F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 120

¹⁰ Acts 4:11

¹¹ Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14

¹² Buddy Miller, "Fall on the Rock," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zdn7AhUGJ70>

¹³ 2 Corinthians 6:2

¹⁴ Acts 17:31

¹⁵ Matthew 3:17

¹⁶ Serge, *Sonship, 3rd Edition*, 188-189

Joey Shaw, who is a missions pastor at one of the largest sending churches in the U.S. says this,

We often get questions like, “What motivates your church to send your best and brightest to the ends of the earth?” It surprises many to hear that the root of our confidence among the nations is not pragmatism, or strategy, or an easy opportunity to bear lots of disciple-making fruit. Rather, our confidence is rooted in truth. This truth is the supreme authority of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” Jesus says. “Therefore,” or in light of that authority, “go”.¹⁸ Fight to believe that, and not only may you find yourself getting into conversations about Jesus without having a panic attack, you may also find yourself walking away from such conversations without having a panic attack. Here’s why: not only is God in charge of the opposition, he’s in charge of the recognition.

II. God’s in Charge of the Recognition

Ok, so not only have the Sadducees personally experienced Jesus and still condemned him, they have now observed undeniable miracles right before their eyes, and they are still completely blind to the truth about Jesus. They don’t even ask how the apostles got out of prison (which they were probably better off for since they didn’t even believe in angels¹⁹). Instead, they went straight to self-protection,

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.” Acts 5:28

“you intend to bring [Jesus’] blood upon us” is an Old Testament way of saying, ‘You are trying to get us killed for responsibility in this man’s death.’²⁰ Which is actually ironic because these Jewish leaders actually compelled their people at Jesus’ trial not only to crucify him but to shout these exact words: “His blood be upon us and our children!”²¹

These pitiful men actually reminded me of a story by Edgar Allen Poe called “The Tell-Tale Heart”. In it the main character kills an elderly man and hides his body under the floorboard. When the police come to investigate, the main character begins hearing

¹⁷ Joey Shaw, *All Authority: How the Authority of Jesus Upholds the Great Commission*, 5

¹⁸ Matthew 28:18-19

¹⁹ Polhill, 166

²⁰ Polhill, 169

²¹ Stott, 116; Matthew 27:25

a knocking sound, and he is convinced it is the old man's heartbeat coming back to life and giving away his crime. The knocking eventually gets so loud that in a frenzy he confesses his crime to the police, all the while failing to realize the knocking sound was actually the beating of his own guilty heart.

I believe the Sadducees and Pharisees are in a similar frenzy in this story, fighting to cover up their crimes and yet somehow at the same time, being completely blind to their own guilt. Even Paul, who led the persecution on the church, never in all his testimonies described a twinge of guilt before the day he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus.²² That is because until God opens your eyes, you cannot see. You cannot recognize your need for a Savior, or that Jesus is that Savior.

As the Scriptures say, "God has put them into a deep sleep. To this day he has shut their eyes so they do not see, and closed their ears so they do not hear." Romans 11:8, NLT

And this point is proven again in the story when Gamaliel, the most prominent rabbi of that day, stood up and said,

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!" Acts 5:38-39

The court takes it as wise advice, and we might be tempted to do the same. But think about this: other than the fact that he basically said, 'Just don't do anything and see what happens' (which isn't always the best advice), he was warning them about something that had already been happening for years: "You might even be found opposing God"--they were *already* opposing God!²³ What's amazing here isn't Gamaliel's advice but that God uses a blind rabbi counseling a room of blind rabbis to prevent any hindrance to his gospel going forward.²⁴

That's why you can walk away from talking with others about Jesus (you know those conversations where you're like, 'I don't think that made any sense at all'). You can walk away and not choke on a Hot Pocket of embarrassment or over-analyzation that keeps you from talking about Jesus for a year. Because God's in charge of the recognition, not you.

²² Piper, "Overflowing Grace,"
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/overflowing-grace-for-all-who-believe>

²³ Polhill, 173-174

²⁴ Stott, 118

I have a convenient way of practicing this every week because I get up here to preach. As soon as my feet leave the stage I immediately begin the battle over the dumb things I said and the things I should have said but didn't say. I must wrestle with the temptation to question, 'Did that do any good?' 'Was anyone listening?' 'Was anyone affected?' 'Why am I doing this?! I quit.' See what I mean? When you share the gospel with others, you'll have the same battle. Sharing the gospel leads us back to depending on the gospel.

III. God's in Charge of the Affliction

And here's the thing: even if something bad really does go down, and harsh words or fists come at you because of Jesus, you won't just be ok, you'll be more than ok. Because God's also in charge of the affliction. We read at the end of the story,

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. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. Acts 5:40-42

Even though the apostles escaped with their lives, it didn't mean they escaped with all their skin. They were flogged, which probably meant getting whipped on a rotation of two strikes to the bare back and one to the chest until reaching 39 lashes all together.²⁵ It would have been brutal. And yet they left rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus.

I think in American culture this is extremely hard to understand. How could you limp away bleeding and be happy about it? And not only happy, but emboldened to immediately break the rules and keep right on preaching Jesus? In the upside down kingdom of Jesus the most blessed people aren't those who avoid affliction, but the ones who must endure it. Jesus expressed this in his Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12

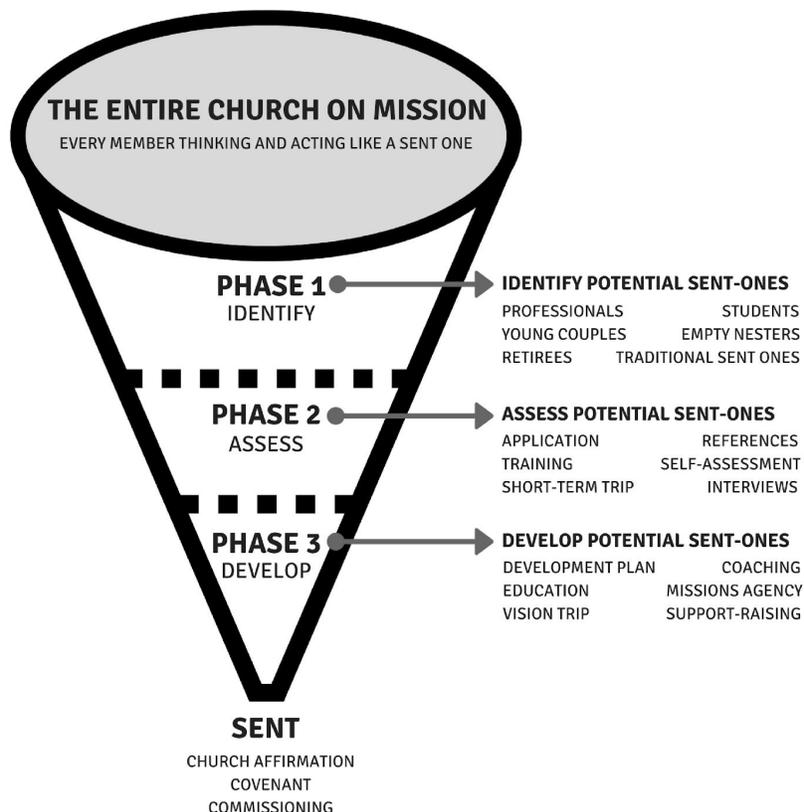
²⁵ Stott, 118

This doesn't necessarily mean that when you get banged up for Jesus on earth, he's setting aside more Christmas presents for you in heaven. Jesus himself is the reward of heaven, and to suffer along the way to getting the reward makes that reward even greater. Suffering severe persecution for the name of Jesus is a privilege that not everyone receives. We are not necessarily "more privileged" by living in a place that is relatively safe, but actually in this regard we are "less privileged" than our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who do experience profound persecution. Having lived among some of them overseas, I learned this from them.

This doesn't mean we say and do stupid or unloving things in order to "get persecuted". It certainly doesn't mean we develop a "martyr's complex," hoping we die for Jesus in a blaze of glory rather than just getting cancer (as though you can't also die for Jesus if you have cancer). We obey, and leave God to be in charge of the afflictions that come or do not come our way.

Conclusion

So how can we as a church continue to grow in relationship with our sending God. What does it practically look like for us to live in light of his great authority? I think it looks something like this, a pipeline:



Every single member of our church would be in the pipeline, thinking and acting like missionaries right here in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and classrooms. And out of the overflow of that some would be called to move further in the pipeline toward being sent out. This would include the phases of identification, assessment, and development before being commissioned and sent.

What will it feel like around here if this continues to be true? I think it will feel like a metro station:



A metro station where people are on the go, all kinds of people. Not just vocational missionaries, but local missionaries, retirees, aid workers, students, intentional travelers, job-makers and job-takers.

Is that crazy? Yes. But it's the crazy that Jesus died for. On the night he was betrayed, when he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of

me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **We are announcing that Jesus Christ is in charge, and in all authority he is calling you to come to him and to go with him.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to my left, your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember what Jesus has done for you. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, let us know so we can help prepare you for baptism and communion. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back and people to pray with you on the sides. Let’s pray.

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ESV Study Bible

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