

v39

- School is out, the **holidays** have begun.
 - I wonder if anyone is fortunate enough to be **getting away** this summer
 - - to a beach or campsite or an AirBNB.
 - If you do, you may end up doing what I've spent a few beach trips doing
 - - **damming** a river.
 - Normally a bucket and spade is all you need, though a **JCB** digger would also be handy
 - The purpose is to block the river w stones or sand until it bursts its banks or changes course.
- But just one word of warning before you get too involved (especially the **blokes**)...
 - You may be able to block its way for a while, or even change its course slightly
 - But you can't stop a river from coming. Just give up!
 - You're fighting something **too big** and powerful.
- And that's true **with the gospel**.
- In the early chapters of Acts, we've been seeing **the gospel go forward**.
- But we've also seen it opposed by 3 satanic forces:
 - 1. External persecution (2 weeks ago)
 - 2. Internal Scandal (last week- Ananias and Sapphira lying and embezzling money)
 - 3. (next week) Internal distraction potentially leading to false teaching .
 - Well today we return to 1- and another wave of persecution
- But the big lesson is that **you can't stop the gospel** river (and that's the title today).
- Let's look at the unstoppable gospel in 4 parts of the story today.

1) v12-16

- This is one of several "**progress reports**" in the book of Acts
- And despite all that's happened in the recent chapters, the gospel is still going out, and the church is growing.
- **v12-13**. I find those words in v13 interesting.
 - "No-one else dared join them".
 - There was a respect for the early Christians, even a sense of fear.
 - A **social distancing**, though not from health but respect grounds.
 - They were highly regarded, perhaps for their godliness and power.
 - No doubt for the amazing miracles that were happening (**v15-16** even the shadow of an apostle was enough to heal or cast out evil)
 - But regarding joining the group many people tended to keep their distance.
 - But that wasn't the whole story... **v14**.
 - Nevertheless. (great word)
 - The gospel went out, and more and more people believed in the Lord.
- **Fear can't block the gospel**. The gospel river pushes past all blockages!
 - (Now we all know, It's not enough to be impressed with Christians,
 - (It's not enough to be moved by Christian teaching or songs
 - (It's not enough even to be helped or healed by the church.
 - You need to actually join up as a disciple of Jesus!
 - But wonderfully God can overcome the barriers that remain.
 - He's drawing people to himself. **FEAR CAN'T BLOCK THE growth of the church**
- How many people have nearly walked away from Christianity, worrying what their friends or family might think. And for some the cost is too great. But wonderfully the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to overcome fear. Fear never wins. His call is "irresistible" .

2) v17-21 PRISON CAN'T HALT THE GOSPEL

- As is the case in chapter 3, the Jewish leaders oppose the gospel despite the miracles.
- v17-18
- It's interesting what was the real reason for this: **jealousy**.
 - It will come again and again in Acts.
 - People don't like it when the neighbouring preacher gets more people than you!
- So they arrest the apostles and put them in **prison**.
 - Well that sounds pretty serious.
 - That sounds like a serious rock to block the gospel's path. But no....
 - God is behind the gospel, and he's committed to the gospel going forward.
 - So he sends an angel to open the door. v19-20.
 - You can't block the gospel.
- And so they go and do exactly what they have been told to do by the divine messenger.
 - v21
 - I love it! Solid metal doors and locks opened by a miracle.
- Prison bars don't block the gospel.
 - It won't be the last time in the book the disciples will find themselves in prison.
 - And not for the last time will they find themselves getting out.
- **Prison can't halt the spread of the gospel.**
 - I don't think it will be long before Christians face prison again for their Christian message and ethics.
 - I don't know whether it will be our generation or our children's generation.
 - But sooner or later someone is going to be back in prison for being a Christian.
 - But remember that prison has never stopped God's work before.
 - God can open prison doors (as we see here).
 - But even if he doesn't, some of God's best work has been done in prison.
 - Joseph learning how to store food to save nations.
 - Paul writing several prison letters.
 - Even Jesus (slightly different) when under arrest as a criminal saved the world.
- So don't think that prison can halt the gospel.
- This is one of the reasons we pray for Littlehey prison nearby and its chaplaincy team.
- Many people have become Christians in prison.
- Prison can't halt the gospel.

3) v21b- 40 COUNCILS CAN'T BAN THE GOSPEL

- Second half of v21 Well next morning the Sanhedrin comes together.
- This is the council of Jewish leaders who rule the affairs of the Temple and Judaism in Jerusalem.
- Now this would make me pretty scared.
 - These are the guys that condemned Jesus to death.
 - It's one thing to be put into prison for a night
 - But to be on trial before a panel of leaders who hate your guts.
 - What's next?
- Well perhaps we should be reminded of their **powerlessness** from the comedy sketch that follows- they can't even find their prisoners.
- v22a
- You can imagine the conversation in the council meeting.
 - "They are taking an awfully long time, shall we move onto the next item on the agenda or shall we wait?"
 - I'd say we wait brother Alexander. The prison is just next door, it won't take long.
 - "Shall I go and give them a hand". No give it a moment Caiaphas. Maybe they are struggling to find the right keys for the lock.
 - (more tapping of fingers, and doodling with biro) and then the prison security come in.

- v22-23
 - It's an extraordinarily embarrassing problem.
 - The council is meeting to deal with the prisoners who have vanished overnight.
- (I think Luke enjoyed recording this one) v24.
 - Wouldn't you have loved to see the look on everyone's faces!
 - The Temple Guard must have been a bit embarrassed having lost several prison.
- Fortunately, they were put out of their misery by an unnamed messenger, maybe a janitor or one of those random passers-by who loves to get involved. v25-26.
- They bring them in and try and slam down some boulders, the dam, the sand across the river!
- STOP PREACHING! v27-28
- But Peter has got it. **Some of us will be facing this choice in our lives. God or humans!**
- That's the decision. Who are you going to obey?
 - God who is so behind his gospel that he opens prison doors to make it known.
 - Or a puny council.
 - Puny councils can look pretty scary.
 - And next time we face the Sanhedrin they are about to launch rocks at Stephen and kill him.
 - But God's plans vs human plans. Which do you think are going to win?
- And we have a lovely little sermon.
- It shows the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives giving them boldness to preach the good news.
- They don't miss an opportunity. v29.
- Just pause on this gospel summary again. Because it's these truths that give us confidence when we are facing scary groups of people.
 - THE GOSPEL EVENTS – v30 the resurrection after the cross.
 - THE GOSPEL EXPLANATION – v31
 - THE GOSPEL INVITATION – v31b
 - THE GOSPEL WITNESSES – v32.
 - In a big way before a council or in a small way before our friends, we will get opportunities to speak up for Jesus.
 - It will be hard.
 - It will be messy
 - It will be embarrassing
 - Let us remember these solid realities. GOD RAISED JESUS!
 - **The river can't be dammed!**
 - **not even the boulder of death blocks the gospel!**
 - And let us pray that God will give us the words to say (as Jesus promised in Lk12)
 - Let us testify with his power about the Living Lord Jesus who is the King.
 - And let us remember that however much they may try, **councils can't ban the gospel**.
- That's actually what we see in the paragraph about Gamaliel.
 - I love the Gamaliel principle.
 - I'll let you reread the section in your own time.
 - But Gamaliel- who was a well known Pharisee at the time – more moderate than the saducees,
 - he gave 2 examples from recent history of
 - great jewish leaders who had become great flops
 - And he said..... v38-39
 - You can't stop the gospel river.
 - If it's just a man-made message, it will soon fade. (like theudas and Judas)
 - And 2000 years on, it doesn't seem to be showing any signs of that.
 - But it's not made on planet earth.
 - The gospel is the message of the risen Jesus, and it's made in heaven.
 - And that's why you can't stop the gospel.

- It's worth remembering that if you're not a Christian.
 - Fight the gospel and you'll find yourself fighting God!
- Gamaliel's speech persuaded them amazingly.
- God had put the right thought into the right person's mind at the right time.
- **It only needs one person to speak up..**
 - [It was wonderful to have someone speak up in the early meetings about CCH
 - I remember a deanery synod at which someone gave 3 reasons why CCH shouldn't happen in Huntingdon.
 - And then a little lady called Rosemary, the vicar of St Barnabas church, from a very different background from us stood up and gave a reason from the Bible why CCH should go ahead.]
- But I didn't get flogged.
- These guys did.
- Let's go to the final section...

4) PERSECUTION CAN'T STOP THE GOSPEL (v40-42)

- v40-42
 - That is amazing.
 - Flogging was done with leather strips with pieces of bone on the end
 - It could lacerate the back leaving permanent scars.
- But the apostles left rejoicing.
 - They were walking literally in the path that Jesus had trod.
 - And God had vindicated Jesus, and God would vindicate them.
- Did it stop them from preaching?
 - Come on... Can you stop the gospel? God is behind it.
 - Can you dam the river?
 - No- it will only pop out somewhere else.
 - It will burst its banks.
 - It will carry on down to the sea.
 - That's what matters to these guys.
 - They must have been so convinced of the importance of the gospel
 - And the God given nature of the gospel.
 - v42.
- How fortunate we are in the UK that we aren't persecuted physically for our faith.
- It may come.
 - Here's some stats from the Barnabas fund in Northern Nigeria....QUOTE
 - And here's what local Christians are saying....QUOTE
 - Barnabas Fund magazine.
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- **Coronavirus**
- **Technology**
- **Not having a building.**
- **people's life circumstances affecting what they can do at church**
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- Well I think there are 2 lessons from this chapter...
- **1) DON'T FIGHT THE GOSPEL**
 - Maybe you aren't a Christian but tuning in today.
 - Intrigued by Christian people
 - Intrigued by Christian message.
 - Don't fight it.
 - in your own live
 - in others' lives
 - You'll only find yourself fighting God.
 - Trust Jesus Christ. v31.
 - Repentance and forgiveness of sins.
 - I love the story of ▲ Stephen Lungu.
 - Went to oppose the gospel and throw a petrol bomb into a gospel tent
 - Ended up being brought to Jesus that very meeting.
- **2) DO SHARE THE GOSPEL**
 - This might not initially make sense.
 - If God will make the gospel river flow without me, why do I need to speak up?
 - Answer- cos he uses people, and if you don't you'll be left out in his great plans and adventure!
 - Don't bottle it up.
 - God doesn't need to use you.
 - He can bypass you.
 - But if the Spirit is in you, he wants you to speak.
 - Is sharing the good news just for other people's jobs in church?
 - It's your job too.
 - Speak up.
 - It's hard.
 - We face rejection,
 - we face ridicule,
 - we face strained relationships.
 - But since God is advancing his kingdom, it could be through you that it comes!
- There's a danger with online church.
 - We settle in with our coffee on our sofas.
 - We become spectators rather than participants.
 - We can think that Christianity is a spectator sport.
 - No- it's an active participation with the Holy Spirit!
 - Let's get out there, and be in the lives of our friends and neighbours.
- Can I give you a challenge this week.
 - why doesn't each one of us pray for...
 - **One really significant conversation this week...**
 - "would you like to try out our church?"
 - "Would you like a book to read over the holidays?" (Lungu)
 - "what's your view of Christianity?"
 - God doesn't need to use CCH
 - He could divert the river v21-v21b-40 of his blessing elsewhere to reach Huntingdon
 - But wonderfully he loves to use sinners like us.
 - Let's pray that we might have the joy of being part of the gospel river as it brings great blessing to many people.
 - **LET'S PRAY.**
- **CHURCH FAMILY NEWS.**