

IN THE SHADOW OF THE APOSTLES
Rev. Lawrence Baldrige
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AC 5:27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

AC 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

AC 5:40 His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

AC 5:41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 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 Christ.

In the song, *Wind Beneath My Wings*, one finds the words, ‘you were always in my shadow.’ I find it interesting that the power of God was so present in the early days of the Pentecost experience that the people actually tried to get their sick into the place where Peter’s shadow would fall upon them, believing that even that would give them healing. ^{AC 5:15} “As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.” As I read this, while struggling to find a common theme in the remainder of Acts 5, it occurred to me that these were largely unrepeatable acts, were signs and wonders that brought the lost and unbelieving to faith in Jesus—that we would always be ‘in the shadow of the Apostles.’ The sick will never be healed in our shadow.

There are, however, some very important ways that we should not be ‘in the shadow of the Apostles.’ These ways are specified in our Scripture today. We should not be in the shadow of the apostles in our OBEDIENCE TO OUR LORD’S COMMANDS.

These early Christians were simply being obedient to their Lord’s commands. Had He not commanded in Matthew 8:23-30? ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Had not their Lord promised in Acts 1:8? ⁸ “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.” The early church was aflame with the Spirit of God. They knew that God had given them a sacred task and they would obediently carry it out even if in the process it meant their death; for they believed that establishing the Kingdom of God on earth was a task worth dying for.

Look at the verses in our text that prove this theme: ²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”

^{AC 5:21} At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

Miraculously released from prison they went forth doing what they had been told to do. Then in verse 29-- ^{AC 5:29} Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!” Then in verse 32--³² “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

We should not stand in the shadow of the apostles in OBEDIENCE. When the Lord tells us to go, we should go; when He tells us to stop, we should stop. He is, after all, our Lord! He knows both what is best for the Kingdom and what is best for us. And if our own obedience leads to our death, we are still to do what He commands. I believe it was Bonhoeffer who said, “The call to discipleship is a call to die.” Bonhoeffer did die in his faithful resistance to the anti-Christ Nazi’s who were destroying his beloved Germany, and trying to destroy the indestructible Kingdom of God. Jesus is still calling for obedience in His Kingdom. The ringing words of heaven are as real as they were to young Isaiah, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” We simply need to answer, “Here am I, Lord, send me.”

Our obedience assures us of the Presence of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. As Peter says, “...and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

This Fall the churches of Three-Forks Baptist Association, and Baptist Churches throughout Kentucky, will be ‘prayer-walking’ their entire church fields. The purpose is to pray for everyone on our church field so that they will be responsive to the Gospel when, in the Spring, we give them the Gospel. I encourage all of you and invite you to help us in this coming effort. Above all, I charge you to be Obedient to our Lord’s command to go in His Name.

Again, we should not stand under the shadow of the Apostles in our BOLDNESS. After all, we have the same Lord. The Bible tells us to be strong and to be courageous. The Bible tells us to be bold. The Bible tells us to not give in to our own timidity and fear. Listen to God’s word to His people after Moses’ death: LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ^{JOS 1:2} “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to

them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

With that promise came this charge: ^{JOS 1:6} “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. ⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Listen to these words in Jeremiah:

^{JER 1:4} The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

^{JER 1:5} “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

^{JER 1:6} “Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

That answer did not please the Lord. He said, ^{JER 1:7} But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

And then God said to the Prophet: ^{JER 1:17} “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. ¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

You see, we need a BOLDNESS that comes from the Promises of God and is centered in the Commands of God. Only such a Boldness will help us in our Obedience, which must be done always with courage and with faith. Peter was a man like us—we do not have to stand under his shadow in our Boldness; Moses was a man like us—we do not have to stand under his shadow either. Jeremiah was a human being like us—we need not stand under his shadow. And we could add all the great heroes of the Old and New Testaments. They had not one ounce more of God than we have. Even if we go in fear and trembling we will still get the job done if we go, basing always our goings upon

God's commands and God's promises.

The Boldness of the early Christians got them put into prison; but the boldness of the early Christians also got them miraculously released so that they could boldly preach and teach God's Word. Further, their Boldness helped them stand before the highest court of the land and say, "We ought to obey God rather than man." Let us be bold also. We do not have to stand under the shadow of the apostles in our boldness.

Martin Niemoeller did not stand under the shadow of the Apostles. In 1934, Adolph Hitler called all the German church leaders to Berlin to berate them for not supporting his Nazi program. Pastor Niemoller explained to Hitler that he and the other leaders were only concerned for the welfare of the church and the German people. Hitler snapped back, "You confine yourself to the church. I'll take care of the German people." Niemoller answered, "You said 'I will take care of the German people.' But we too, as Christians and churchmen, have a responsibility toward the German people. That responsibility was entrusted to us by God, and neither you nor anyone in this world has the power to take it from us."

During the following months he was closely watched by the Gestapo, and when he preached in June 1937, these words got him arrested and put into prison: "We have no more thought of using our own powers to escape the arm of the authorities than had the apostles of old. We must obey God rather than man." Placed in solitary confinement, his trial began on February 7, 1938. He worried about his family and about the impending death he felt would come. As he was led through the tunnel to his trial, his guard whispered softly Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe." These words sustained him through his trial and the years in a Nazi concentration camp.

Nor should we stand under the shadow of the apostles in the CONTENT of our teaching and preaching. Here's what Peter said: ^{AC 5:29} Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

The Apostles and Peter preached and taught that Jesus of Nazareth, God's only Son and Messiah, was crucified for our sins. God has made a way for sinful Israel; God has made a way for the sinful world. That is the way of Grace. God's Love paid the price that we could not pay ourselves. ^{Eph. 2:8-9} "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast." That will always be the first part of the Content of the Christian Gospel. John 3:16; Romans 5:8; ^{Titus 3:4} But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been

justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

In these verses in Titus, Paul was telling the young Bishop of Cyprus, who was incidentally his protégé, to stay true to the content of the Gospel. Jesus died for our sins.

In the Book of Acts Peter clearly preaches the Resurrection, for he knew that the Cross meant nothing without the Resurrection. A dead Christ on a cross or in a tomb cannot be a Prince and Lord, and cannot forgive our sins. It takes a victorious Savior to save sinners and to give them the power to overcome their sinful lifestyles. The Resurrection must be always a vital part of the content. Why? Because it is true! Jesus died for our sins! Jesus is risen from the dead! Just as important is the Ascension and Enthronement of our Lord! He who humbled Himself and became obedient, even unto death, has been exalted to the place of absolute power at the Right Hand of God, from which He heals, forgives sin, and helps us in our daily lives through the Holy Spirit He has given to us. Moreover, He will return to destroy all the works of satan, and set up an Eternal Kingdom when He returns.

We must teach and preach a complete Gospel, just as did the Apostles. We do not stand under their shadow and water down the Content of the Eternal Gospel of the Blessed God and our Savior, Jesus the Christ, our Lord. Preach it all, brother! Preach it all! And never forget to preach the saving Blood of Jesus Christ! Paul said, “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto them which are saved it is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

In Christianity Today, Dr. Paul Brand shared an experience from his days in India as a medical missionary. He came to the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, joining the famous surgeon, Dr. Reeve Bretts from Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Brand wrote that the Indian people thought that the ‘blood is the life.’ For that reason they were extremely reluctant to give blood, even to save their own children. In one such case there were only two pints of blood on hand and a 12 year old girl needed an infected lung removed which would require 3 pints of blood. Many family members were present; so Dr. Bretts explained the situation to them, and none of them stepped forward to give the blood. Explaining that she would have to go home and die without the operation, the family huddled together and put forth an elderly woman who weighed less than 100 pounds to give the blood.

Seeing the healthy young men who as family members could more easily give the blood, Dr. Bretts became so upset that he spoke in Tamil and blasted the cowering family members, and as Dr. Brand said, the bald spot on the top of his head turned red from his anger. Finally Dr. Bretts said to Dr. Paul Brand, “Paul come over here and take my blood. I’m a better donor than this poor woman.” Dr. Brand hooked him up and started taking his blood. When the family saw that there was a great babel of voices. One of them cried out, “Look, the sahib doctor is giving his own life.” That is what Jesus did for you. “Look at Calvary and you will say the same: “Jesus is giving His own life for me.”

The Bible promises that we need not stand under the Apostles shadow finally in REJOICING. The Psalmist declared, “He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” In the Christian faith there will be persecution, but there will also be REJOICING. Listen to the words in our Scripture: ^{AC 5:41} The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 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 Christ.

Every time that anything happened, good or bad, it ultimately resulted in the Church being filled with joy, being filled with the Holy Spirit, rejoicing to be counted worthy to suffer for His Name’s sake. Unfortunately, the church today, has largely lost its joy. Vance Havner is perhaps right when he says, “...churches that started out in revival fires are living in the smoke.” That should not be the case. The Bible says, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.”

But we will remain under the shadow of the apostles if we do not live in Obedience, and in Boldness, teaching and preaching the true and complete Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Norman Vincent Peale once visited a friend in the hospital who had earlier lost one leg, and now had the second leg amputated. However, he never lost his joy and happiness. When Peale visited him he said, “Everyone tells me you’re the happiest person in the hospital. You are not putting it on are you?” Obviously the man said that his joy was real. Peale asked him, “What is the secret of your joy?” The man said, “See that little book lying there on the table,” the man replied, pointing to the Bible. “There is where I get my medicine. When I feel a little low, I just read that Book.”

When we are obedient to the word of God, bold in doing the word of God, and preaching and teaching the Truth of the Gospel, even in persecutions we will REJOICE. Joy and rejoicing is the very heart and hallmark of Christianity. There can be no Christianity without the Joy of Jesus Christ in the soul.

We do not have to dwell in the shadow of the apostles, but for me and my family there is One Shadow in which we should be. ^{PS 91:1} “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”