

SNAP RESPONSE: LOVING OUR CITY

- As you know, there's been a pause in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
 - Roughly 34,000 people in Knoxville rely on the program for food assistance—and we want to help.
 - We gathered some leaders to brainstorm how our church could respond to this need and came up with all kinds of ideas!
 - Then we spoke with local ministry partners and our friends at Lakeview Apartments to see how we can help.
 - Here's three things we're going to do—even if the freeze is lifted tomorrow:
1. **Thanksgiving Boxes.** You've heard about this one already, but these boxes go directly to families affected by food insecurity. Our goal is to provide 1,250 boxes—right now we're only at 306.
 2. **Lakeview Apartments.** As a church we want to go deeper in loving our immediate community. As part of that we've been building intentional friendships with the residents at Lakeview Apartments—an affordable housing development. We're going to provide a weekly dinner for all 250 residents for the month of November. If you want to help with that, go to cspc.net/news and reach out to Allie Dempsey.
 3. **Local Ministry Partners.** We have local ministry partners who have already jumped into action and have needs. Thanks to your previous generosity, we will be distributing money out of our disaster relief fund to help them in this time of crisis. You can further support their efforts by giving to them directly or showing up to serve. We've listed some of these organizations and their immediate needs on our website. You can also follow this QR Code.
- We will continue to check-in with our partners and respond as the needs change.
 - Why are we doing all this?
 - In response to the love of God, we want to be the church at its best...
 - Remember last week's text?

Acts 4:34-35: Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

ACTS 5:12-42

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

- CTA re: SNAP
- Read. Pray.

INTRODUCTION

- The comfort zone... Don't we love it?
 - That invisible boundary where everything feels familiar and safe.
 - Your favorite seat on the couch.
 - Your go-to coffee order the barista already knows.
 - The work projects you can do with your eyes closed.
 - That deep emotional attachment to your side of the bed.
 - And of course—your favorite pew at church.
 - We all have—and love—those comforting rhythms, patterns, and routines that make life feel safe, predictable, and under control.
- But here's the question: What if the comfort zone we love is the very thing that's holding us back?
- Bc here's the thing: When you say yes to Jesus and step out of your comfort zone to be his witness—you start to experience things you never would have otherwise.
 - Things you can't learn from a book, things you won't find on the couch, things too big, too wild, and too beautiful to fit the comfort zones we create.
 - The abundant life Jesus offers can only be experienced when we say yes and step out to live the way he invites us to live.
- That's what happens in our passage today.
 - The early church said yes to Jesus—*We will be your witnesses!*
 - In the lives we lead and the words we speak—we'll tell everyone there's a new king.
 - He offers a fresh start, new healing, purpose, and joy for today, and the solid hope of life forevermore.
 - As they do that—as they step out—they find themselves experiencing things they'd never experienced before.
 - They're drawn into the life of X—his power, his pain, and his pleasure.¹
 - What they found, we can find—if we'll step out today.

[Transition]

- Let's get into it...
- When you say yes to Jesus—and step out your comfort zone—you experience new...

1. POWER

[State]

- The first section of our passage overflows with the supernatural power of God at work among his people.
 - Peter has the **power** to know that Ananias and Sapphira have lied (5:1-11).
 - The apostles have the **power** to heal (5:12-16).
 - God pours out miraculous **power** so multitudes are saved (5:14).
 - And God's **power** miraculously releases the disciples from jail (5:17-26).
- The picture is extraordinary: Power upon power upon power—to discern, heal, save, and deliver.
- And it's not random: These miracles mirror the works of Jesus himself.
 - He knew hearts, and healed, and saved, and delivered.
 - The work he began continues through his church.
- But here's the question that arises from the text:
 - Would the disciples have known such grand displays of God's power if they'd cowered in fear bc of the command to keep silent?
 - Probably not. It was only bc they stepped out—out of comfort into obedient faith—that they experienced God's power in such miraculous ways.

[Illustrate]

- Of course we need to embrace the mystery of this power.
 - Even Peter's shadow brings healing in these verses.
 - We think: *"My shadow doesn't do that!"*
 - But neither did Peter's at other times and places.
 - N. T. Wright says: *"There is always a strange unknown quality about God's healing."*²
 - God works in the way he wants.
 - Sometimes it's hard for us to figure it out.
- *"All of that is part of the mystery of living at the overlap between the **present age**, with its griefs and sorrows and decay and death, and the **age to come**, with its new life and energy and restorative power."*³

[Apply]

- The point for us is this: God's power is often revealed in the path of obedience.
 - If the disciples had chosen silence, they'd have missed it.
 - Bc they said yes to Jesus—obeying his command to be witnesses—they experienced a new power that blew their minds.
- And that's what can be true for us as well.
 - When you say yes to Jesus and step out, you're stepping into the place his power is known.
 - The same Spirit who filled the disciples will also fill you.
- Imagine we did that today?

- It's happening in our church:
 - One member **prayed for her daughter** in prison. The next thing they know, God's power—she's been released, she's sober, and she's attending our church.
 - Another member said yes to a **mission trip**. The next thing they know, God's power—she has a new heart for evangelism and even led a friend to Christ.
- What about you?
 - Does your faith feel a bit dry? Or like you're running on autopilot?
 - Maybe it's time to say yes, take a risk, step out.
 - Step into being a **witness**...
 - Share Jesus with a friend—see if God opens their heart.
 - Invite that family member to church—see if God stirs them to come.
 - Have that hard conversation—watch what God does.
 - Or step into **service**...
 - Volunteer in that ministry that intrigues you—watch God use gifts you never knew you had.
 - Give sacrificially—see how God provides.
 - Get involved in our food efforts—see if you experience the power of God.
 - Step into what God puts on your heart—trust him to meet you there.
- Bc here's the truth of these verses: Obedience often provides the setting to experience God's power at work.

[Transition]

- When you say yes to Jesus—and step out of your comfort zone—you experience new **power**.
- Second, we'd be remiss to ignore that the same obedience that drew the apostles into Christ's **power** also draws them into **pain**.

2. PAIN

[State]

- In **VV17-18** the religious leaders, **filled with jealousy... arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.**
- In **VV27-28** they're brought before the council and accused: **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.**
- In **V29** the apostles respond with gospel courage: **We must obey God rather than men.**
- In **V33**, when the council hears this: **They were enraged and wanted to kill them.**

- You can feel the tension—murderous violence simmers in the room.
- But then Gamaliel—a respected Pharisee—stands up and counsels restraint, reminding them of other movements that had come and gone, urging them in **VV38-39**: If this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.
- His words prevail.
 - The apostles are spared execution—for now.
 - But **V40** tells us, 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.
 - Imprisoned. Beaten. Threatened.
 - Their obedience brings pain.

[Illustrate]

- Following Jesus isn't all sunshine and roses, health and wealth, fun and games.
- That's a message we need to remind ourselves of today.
- If you witness for Jesus:
 - It won't always make you "fitter, happier, more productive."⁴
 - Sometimes it will lead to pain.
 - You probably won't be thrown in jail or beaten—like the disciples and many believers around the world today.
 - But you might be misunderstood, people might think you're weird, you might find yourself in awkward situations, you might feel lonely or isolated, you might have to endure some things you'd really rather not, or you might have to give up some comforts that you like.

[Apply]

- My encouragement is to pick that pain.
 - Pain will come whether we follow Jesus or not.
 - We know that from the way life works.
 - Exercise is hard. Heart attacks are harder.
 - Marriage is hard. Divorce is harder.
 - Purity is hard. Addiction is harder.
 - It's the same with witnessing: Obedience is hard. Disobedience is harder.
- So pick the pain that you won't regret.
 - The pain of regret is bitter.
 - But the pain that comes with obedience is sweet.
- Think of Peter...
 - Do you think he regretted the pain that came from denying Jesus? When he withered under the glare of a little girl? You bet.
 - But what about this passage? Do you think he regretted the pain that came from being a witness? No chance.
 - It gave him the opportunity to fellowship with Christ.
 - It gave him the joy of seeing multitudes come to Christ.

- This week one of our staff members told me:
 - “It feels easier to say yes than to keep saying no.”
 - She gets it.
 - It’s not easy to say yes to being a witness...
 - But it’s easier than the pain of regret.
- Don’t let fear of pain stop you from being a witness.
 - If we suffer for Jesus—we suffer with him.
 - And—like the first disciples—we’ll see him do amazing things through our pain.
 - And we will never regret it.

[Transition]

- When you say yes to Jesus—and step out your comfort zone—you experience new **power**, you experience new **pain**, but that’s not the end of the story...
- When you walk with him, the road always bends toward joy.
- The **power** and **pain** lead you to experience **pleasure** in him.

3. PLEASURE

[State]

- Look at **VV41-42**: 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.
- That’s wild, isn’t it? They’ve been thrown in jail. Beaten. Threatened.
 - How would you respond? They rejoice.
 - The same disciples who so recently ran from the cross now rejoice in bearing their own.
- How do we make sense of this? How did they do this?
 - I’m sure they took great joy in seeing the fruit of their work—multitudes of men and women coming to Christ.
 - But look closely at the text: It says they rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.
 - Whose name? Jesus’s name.

[Illustrate]

- Do you remember what **Hebrews 12:2** says about him? For the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
 - Jesus endured pain for the joy that was set before him...
 - The joy of saving us.
- Now his disciples do the same:

- They endure pain, despising the shame, for the joy that is set before them.
- What is that joy? Jesus himself—the name.
 - Any pain you experience as a witness is worth it, bc Jesus is worth it.
 - We don't fall into self-pity—it is a privilege to suffer for our king.
 - He is with us in it.
 - He gives us the strength to endure it.
 - And he promises that one day—it will all be gone.
 - Obedience to him produces joy.

[Apply]

- If we don't say yes, if we don't step out, if we're not his witnesses—we miss out on great pleasure.
 - The pleasure of bringing that friend to church.
 - The pleasure of seeing that family member come to faith.
 - The pleasure of seeing God at work on a mission trip.
 - The pleasure of realizing you're being changed yourself.
 - But most of all—the pleasure of doing it all with Christ.
- Being his witness will give you more of him—and he will bring you great joy.

THE CLOSE

- So, what about that comfort zone?
 - That invisible boundary where everything feels familiar and safe.
 - What if the comfort zone we love is the very thing that's holding us back?
- In a recent Live Deeply story, one of our members shared she's stopped using the phrase “comfort zone” and has replaced it with “shackles” instead.
 - That sounds about right.
 - The comfort zone doesn't lead to life—it ties you up and holds you back.
- Here's my invitation:
 - This week, take a risk for Jesus that you wouldn't have taken otherwise.
 - With a friend, a family member, or co-worker.
 - Ask if you can pray for them, send them a Bible verse or a sermon, share your faith, or invite them to church—do something to be a witness for Christ.
 - And just see what happens.
 - You might just experience new **power**—his strength at work in you and through you.
 - You might experience new **pain**—but he's with you, you can endure it, and one day it will all be gone.
 - You might experience new **pleasure**—deeper joy in him.

The church at its best—full of power, pain, and pleasure—as we witness for Christ.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone*.

Endnotes

¹ I owe the outline of this text and several of the exegetical observations to Paul Jeon, *Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth—part 6*.

² N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, 85.

³ Wright, 86.

⁴ See Radiohead's, *Fitter Happier*.