"Five Essentials of Evangelism" Part 1

We have gone through the book of Acts and seen the foundation of the church essentially laid. We remember how the gospels end. In particular, also the gospel of Luke, who is the writer of Acts with a commission to evangelize the world. There will be the coming of the Holy Spirit our Lord tells His followers and when the Spirit comes, the Spirit will enable His people to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. This proclamation will go on for all of human history until our Lord Jesus returns to establish His glorious kingdom.

The church exists on earth for the purpose of its own development. The church is the means by which the Lord builds the church. He gathers His redeemed through the agency of His redeemed. He uses believers to bring about the salvation of other believers. This is what the apostle Paul reminds us of when he says, “How will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they’re sent?” It is the church’s responsibility then to send out its people for the proclamation of the gospel for the gathering of the rest of God’s people. This is the church’s mission on earth. This isn’t part of what we do; this is the objective of everything we do.

So as we come through the early chapters of the book of Acts, we have come through the part where the Holy Spirit comes. The declaration is made by our Lord that when He comes, “You will be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.” We’ve gone through the Day of Pentecost. We’ve seen the coming of the Spirit. The birth of the church has taken place. The church has begun to grow through the means of the proclamation of the gospel. Chapter 2, verse 41 says that the day the church was born 3,000 souls came to true faith in Christ. So on its first day, 3,000 people were in not only the church universal, but the church local in the city of Jerusalem.

Chapter 2, verse 47 then tells us that the Lord added daily to the church, the number of people who were being saved. So starting with 3,000 every day that passes by more people are being converted under the preaching of the gospel. We come into chapter 4 and verse 4. “There were many who heard the message of the apostles, concerning the gospel of Christ and they believes and the number of men came to be about 5,000.” So the church is undergoing explosive growth, and that’s specifically counting men. We know there would be no doubt an equal number of women. Thousands of people are coming to Christ in the early weeks and months of the life of the church. We come to chapter 5, and that’s where we are going to be looking.

I draw you initially down to verse 14 where we read, “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number.” These would be in the thousands. This church is exploding. We come into chapter 6 and verse 7, “The Word of God kept on spreading. The number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem. There’s no diminishing and now it has swept through a great many of the priests who are becoming obedient to the faith.”

We come over to chapter 8, and it’s still happening. “Here the crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.” We come into chapter 9 and verse 31. The church throughout all Judea has now stretched from Jerusalem into Judea into Galilee and into Samaria, as our Lord said it would. It’s enjoying peace. It’s being built up as the months have gone by and the folks are going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and it continue to increase. We can assume that hundreds and thousands more are being add4ed to the church.

We come to even chapter 11, and maybe we’ll stop at that point, verse 21. “The hand of the Lord is with the apostles as they extend into the land of the Gentiles. A large number who believed turned to the Lord.” Verse 24 ends with, “A considerable number were brought to the Lord.” This is the story of the early church. It is literally a cyclone of evangelism, a kind of tsunami of gospel proclamation, amazing evangelism, amazing results as thousands of people are being drawn into the kingdom through the preaching of the gospel by the purpose and will of God and through the proclamation of the truth. God is building His church.

Jesus, you remember said, “I will build My church and the gates of hades will not prevail against it.” That is exactly what is happening. The church then, and I want to lay this down; not that you don’t understand it, but to make sure nobody is left out in this understanding. The church is the gathering of believers in Jesus Christ. That’s what the church is, the true and living church. A local expression of that church is simply a physical collection of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who come together for the purpose of fellowship and prayer and the breaking of bread and the testimony of mutual love, mutual care, mutual ministry around the apostle’s doctrine.

This is a church. A church then is a gathering of believers in a local place. That’s what this is. That’s what churches have always been. They come under the leadership defined in Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians 4:11 says that when the Lord ascended, He gave some gifts to His church. What were the gifts? First, apostles and prophets historically, and they were followed by evangelists and teaching pastors. They are given to the church for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ. The church is the body of Christ, believers who are in Christ, drawing their life out of Him who is the head. The church comes together as the body of Christ to serve. It is equipped for that service by the evangelists and teaching pastors, “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

What is the objective of the church as it gathers the church, as it lives out its life, the church as it meets? It is to be conformed to Christ’s likeness. The purpose of the church then is edification. When it gathers, it gathers to be edified. It gathers to be edified through the proclamation of truth, through worship and mutual ministry and prayer, and all of the elements of fellowship. That is a church so that it matures. It grows up in grace and in the knowledge of Christ through the proclamation of divine revelation so that, verse 14, it is made up, “No longer of children, who are tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. The goal of leadership in the church, the evangelist and teaching pastors to the church is to bring the church to maturity.

“And we live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. We grow in grace when we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in Scripture. The church gathers then to be edified, to grow into Christ-likeness. It should never be the case that people are in a “church” and are frustrated because no one really is providing for them the necessary food for their spiritual development. That doesn’t seem to be the objective and the goal in many contemporary churches, which are more designed to entertain unbelievers as somehow a kind of human way to woo them to embrace the gospel. That doesn’t happen by human means. That’s a divine miracle, by the way.

The church then is as its objective, moving by all its means to Christ-likeness. That’s what the church is. Everything that happens in the church is geared to drive the church toward being like Christ; manifesting Christ-like virtue, manifesting Christ-like commitment. The commitment of Christ, of course, obviously beyond His holiness and His absolutely prefect virtue and righteousness was to seek and save the lost. He said, “I am come to seek and save the lost.” So Christ-likeness in its fullest expression is not only spiritual maturity and virtue and holiness, but it is as Christ did, having the passion to seek and save the lost. That is the fulfillment of our commission.

It’s not enough to have the virtue of Christ without the commitment of Christ. That’s why He came into the world. That is the purpose of the incarnation ultimately. That comes out in verse 15 of Ephesians 4, “Maturing and becoming like Christ, we speak the truth in love as we grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.” You cannot be fully Christ-like as an individual or as a collection of believers in the church until it is part and parcel of your life to speak the truth in love. Speak the truth in love.

Evangelism is at the heart of what we do. It is the objective and the goal. It is the reason we’re here in the world. It is why the Lord left us here, but it also is the byproduct of our spiritual development. Evangelism is our mission, but it doesn’t occur effectively. It doesn’t occur dynamically. It doesn’t occur spiritually and supernaturally by the working of the Holy Spirit unless you have Spirit-filled, maturing, Christ-like believers. They are the ones the reproduce.

As we come to chapter 5 and particularly in verse 12 where we’ll pick it up, we see a rather lengthy chapter running all the way to verse 42. I suppose there could be some sermons that break this all up and we may find it rather difficult to get through it in one message, maybe even rather difficult to get through it in two. But it really is one discourse and what you have here are what I see as five elements for the early church’s evangelistic impact. Five elements that defined the early church’s evangelistic impact. They were growing and they were going everywhere, proclaiming the truth. You get a little glimpse of that if you go back into chapter 4, say, at verse 29 where you have the believers, the apostles gathered. They’ve been threatened by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

Verse 29, “And now Lord, take note of their threats and grant that your bondservants, your slaves may speak your Word with all confidence.” They understood that’s why they were in the world, that they existed to speak the Word with confidence. “While you extent your hand to heal and signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and – ” implied, “ – all began to speak the Word of God with boldness.”

They all spoke in languages on the Day of Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Now we see a very dramatic transition. No longer are they speaking in a foreign language. They’re speaking in the language that everyone understands, and they’re speaking the Word of God with boldness, and that’s the language that they themselves know. This boldness, this speaking the Word of God, this proclaiming gospel is produced by the filling of the Holy Spirit. So right there in that section of chapter 4 you see that everyone was filled with the Spirit, and as a result of that, everyone was speaking the Word of God with boldness, with confidence, with as very 29 says, “All confidence.”

If there was anything that defined that early church, it was evangelistic passion and evangelistic zeal. They all were filled. They all were speaking. They were speaking the truth concerning Christ with loving hearts. They were demonstrating their love, verse 32 to 37 how that chapter ends. There wasn’t a needy person among them, verse 34. They were all sharing whatever they had. They were enabling each other to live and eat and have a place to stay and the necessities of life so that they could maintain the force of evangelists, that was proclaiming Christ all throughout the city of Jerusalem.

This is the early church. This is the purpose of every church in every age: to gather for fellowship, the apostles’ doctrine, prayer, the breaking of bread, mutual ministry, service, love, being fed the Word of God. But to scatter with one passion, and that is to proclaim the gospel. As we come to the end of chapter 4, it’s euphoric. Everything seems to be wonderful, almost millennial.

Then you come to chapter 5, and you remember how this chapter begins. We run into the horrible, devastating sin of a couple who professed to be believers by the name of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. They introduced sin into the pure life of the church. We looked at that some weeks ago. Sin like a cancer ate into the fellowship and it threatened to sap their power and destroy their impact on the world; and so it was immediately judged by God in a severe way. Both of them dropped dead, killed by God right in the service worship of the church on the Lord’s Day. God Himself did the disciplining. No sooner had that been done and the church was purified that the church began again its ministry of evangelism. That picks up the text in verse 12 and carries us through this fifth chapter.

Now, as I said, there are a lot of things that unfold in this lengthy chapter. I don’t want to get bogged down in details because it is a narrative. So let me see how much we can cover, but let’s build our thinking around these five elements of a powerful evangelistic church. Five elements necessary for effective evangelism. We’ll sort of draw out of the opening of the chapter.

We’ll identify the first one as purity. Purity is the first one. The church that is going to have an impact must be pure, must be pure. That is vital to a church’s integrity. If you’re going to be announcing to the world that Jesus Christ has come to remove our sin, remove our guilt, to grant us righteousness, to make us a holy people, zealous for good works. If that is our gospel, then it better be visible. It better be visible. That is why a corrupt pastor, corrupt leadership and corrupt people who call themselves Christians and identify themselves as a church is such a devastating thing on evangelism.

The world wants any excuse that it can find to reject the gospel. The most common excuse that you hear and I hear is, “Well, I know a whole lot of people who go to church, and they are nothing but a bunch of – fill in the blank – hypocrites.” This devastates our claim. We are claiming transforming power through Jesus Christ. We are claiming that the Lord can take a sinner and turn him into a saint. We are saying, this is what the gospel promises.

As Robert Murray M’Cheyne once said, “It is not great minds, it is not great plans, it is not great ideas God uses. It is great likeness to Jesus Christ. A holy instrument is an awesome weapon in the hand of God.” A holy life presents the evidence of the transformation the gospel announces, so the church has to be holy if it is to be effective in its evangelism. We’ve talked about that much through the years. The testimony of a church like ours in this community for all these many, many, many years, many, many decades – the greatest testimony of this church is that the gospel we have proclaimed has been upheld by the people in the community who are known as a part of this church.

We can talk about a transforming gospel because there are lives that have been transformed. Discipline in the church is critical. Obviously, if God was still doing it on His own the way He did it in chapter 5, the ranks would be thinned significantly; if God literally took the life of anybody who ever lied to the Holy Spirit. The Lord has made a very clear statement by doing that, but has shown mercy subsequent to that.

God no longer disciplines regularly in the church, although 1 John says, “There is a sin unto death.” There is a time when God may take a life. He did it in Corinth. “Some of you are weak and sick and some of you are dead, you sleep, because of desecrating the Lord’s Table.” So there are times when the Lord Himself disciplines in a church by taking a life. We can assume that still goes on, but not all the time and certainly not in every case.

He has turned the discipline over to the church. He has turned the discipline over to the church. It is our responsibility to follow the patterns of the New Testament commands to holiness. Ephesians 5:11, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” 1 Timothy 5:20, “Them that sin rebuke before all.” Titus 1:13, “Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.” Luke 17:3, “If a brother trespasses against you, rebuke him.” Matthew 18, “If your brother sins, go to him, confront his sin.” If he repents, you’ve gained your brother. If he doesn’t, take two or three witnesses. If he still doesn’t repent, tell the church. If he still doesn’t repent, put him out of the church. Treat him like a tax collector and an outcast.

God did the original discipline, and then turned the discipline over to the church. The early church didn’t sidestep this discipline, didn’t see it as some kind of negative, but as a positive to maintain its purity. God had to be the first teacher. God showed us the severity of sin and showed us the severity of His reaction to sin in the opening verses of chapter 5. He turns over this purity responsibility to the church itself. Peter puts it this way, 1 Peter 4:17, “Judgment must begin at the house of God. Judgment must begin at the house of God.” And if it begins at the house of God, what’s it going to be like for those on the outside, Peter says.

We have the responsibility to do everything possible to sustain purity in the church, and we cannot fear that as if that somehow will cause the church to be rejected. The world rejects the church anyway, rejects the gospel anyway until a divine miracle takes place in the heart. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit. But the purity of the church is it’s testimony to the validity of the gospel. We’re talking about a gospel that transforms people from sinners into saints. Then they better be on display among the people who claim to have had that miracle occur.

So we have no fear about purifying the church, but rather we must be devoted and diligent in that effort. 1 Corinthians 5 even addresses it from the standpoint that it’s like the leaven that permeates everything, affects everything. If you have someone who professes to be a believer, but is living in immorality, you put him out of the church. 1 Corinthians 5 says, “Turn him over to Satan that his soul may be saved even though he may be destroyed,” because a little leaven will leaven everything.

So when we talk about evangelism in the church, we’re talking at the beginning about the church has to maintain its purity. When you see scandalous behavior in the church, scandalous behavior, particularly among the leaders of the church, this just fuels rejection. This fuels animosity. This justifies the unbelievers’ unbelief. Now, let’s see how it played out, that discipline that the Lord did in the opening 11 verses.

Look at verse 12, only the second half of the verse. Let’s start there. The last statement, “They were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch or Solomon’s portico.” That’s the same place where Peter preached in chapter 3, Solomon’s porch. On the east side of the temple court, there was this porch, this massive colonnade where thousands of people could gather together. It was a familiar meeting place. It was an elevated porch beside the great temple court. People would gather in the temple for morning sacrifice, evening sacrifice and all day long for prayers. There was no church building, so the believers met there.

It was, I’m sure, a beloved spot because back in John 10 we find our Lord teaching there in Solomon’s porch. It was named that because it still had the footings from Solomon’s original temple. It was really all that was left. So they were all there. They were all with one accord in that place that had been sanctified by the teaching of our Lord and sanctified again by the wonderful preaching of Peter in Acts, chapter 3. They were all together there in one accord, but notice verse 13. “None of the rest, that’s non-believers, dared associate with them. However, the people held them in high esteem.”

I cannot tell you how important it is to understand those two statements.

To be held in high esteem for your virtue, for your passion, for your zeal, for your confidence, for your boldness is necessary. Also, to be feared is necessary. The church has to be both a testimony to virtue and a testimony to judgment at the same time. The populous saw the church as a group of people who had been transformed. They held them in high esteem. They were different. Their lives had been transformed, but there was no movement on the part of the people to rush in and become a part of this. Why? Because the word spread very rapidly of what had just happened. What had just happened was the execution of two people in the church.

They knew that that is not a place to trifle with. It is a place of transformation, but it is also a place of judgment. People must understand that even today. God may take lives in the church, and we wouldn’t necessarily know that. People die of natural causes, but God may do that in discipline. We wouldn’t know that, but we do know God has turned over to us the responsibility of discipline. Anybody coming and saying, “I want to be a part of this because I want to be a part of the transforming power of Christ in this place,” you must know that sin will be dealt with here.

The pure church deals with sin, keeps itself pure so that the church becomes, on the one hand, wonderfully welcoming and at the same time, frightening. Most churches make church membership a non-issue. Many, many churches don’t even have membership. They don’t even call for any more involvement than showing up occasionally. They want to make sure no one feels personally identified. They make becoming a part of the church easy, cheap, without demand. Not much talk about sin. Certainly, no threat of discipline. This is not right. This is wrong. This is not the place where you make unbelievers feel comfortable.

You cannot accomplish the purposes of God in evangelism by downplaying sin and the purity of the church. The purity of the church is critical to its evangelistic testimony. Churches that are full of sinning people, believers and unbelievers, the church that is never dealing with sin will literally be flooded with hypocrites, flooded with people who have religious impulses, flooded with people who want to make social contact or business contact or be a part of activities or looking for life partners. When the church becomes that, it has totally lost its way, and now it cannot lay the platform for effective evangelism.

What makes our testimony believable is our life, our transformed life. So we are caught in that necessity of being held in high esteem, and that has to be true. The community, the world around us must hold us in high esteem for the demonstrable virtue. But at the same time, be in no hurry to associate, no hurry to become a part. That’s exactly the way it played out in the early church.

The verse that follows in verse 14 gives us so much hope. Because of the church’s devotion to purity and, listen, because people were not joining the church on their own, because in fact, they refused to do that humanly, all the more – what’s the next word? – believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number.” That’s how a church grows. It grows when true believers are added, true believers in the Lord are added. Who does that? That’s the work of the Lord Himself. He is building His church. He is adding to His church.

Jesus said it at the very outset. “If any man will come after me,” Luke 9, “let him deny himself, take up his cross, follow Me.” That’s what it means to be a Christian: self-denial, cross-bearing, and life of obedience. You say goodbye to your sin. You heard the testimonies of the young people. They had to come to a point in their life where they wanted Christ more than their sin, where they wanted Christ to deliver them not only from the guilt, but the power and the presence of their sin. They wanted to be transformed. That’s why you join a church, because you’ve come to Christ and want to be delivered from sin.

If the church strives to be the assembly of people who desire the forgiveness that is offered in the gospel and want to be made holy in Christ, not just declared holy, but made holy; they become a holy people, pursuing holiness. The world will not be in a hurry to rush in and be exposed for what it is. That’s how it should be. The church needs to be separated from the system. The line needs to be so clear, so obvious that there is no confusion.

When the church is pure, people join who seek that purity. When the church deals with sin, people join who want their sin dealt with. I’m not saying we don’t love the people who come. God loved the world and gave His only Son. Christ died for sinners. I’m thankful when sinners come, but they need to know that this is the church, and this is how the church lives. I’m glad when people respect our church. I think about that. At the Christmas concert, people come. They respect the music. They respect the people they know, the friends that bring them, their character, their lives, their families. But they come, and then they don’t come again. I understand that, because this is a place for those who are believers in the Lord, and that’s as it should be.

People say, “Well, we’re not going to grow if we tighten everything down.” I’m not talking about legalism either. “We’re not going to grow if we tighten everything down and become obsessed with sin. We’re just not going to grow.” Yes we are because the Lord will grow His church, and He will add to the church those that are being saved, those that are being delivered. So it all starts with this commitment to purity in the life of the church. Personal testimony, personal testimony is validated by corporate purity, corporate righteousness, corporate saintliness.

It’s awfully hard for people who were true believers in the church where there’s a lot of hypocrites to give a convincing testimony about the work of Christ and even harder if the people in the leadership are publicly shamed in some way. All right, that’s point number one.

Point number two, point number two. Number two is power, and this is unique to the apostolic era. Go back to verse 12. “At the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were taking place among the people.” Signs and wonders were taking place publicly, publicly. Verse 15, “To such an extent were these signs and wonders – ” by the way, 12b through 14 is a parenthesis. So 12a, then parenthesis, ends at the end of verse 14; 15 picks up from 12a. “To such an extent these signs and wonders that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also, the peoples from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.”

This is an explosion of apostolic signs and wonders, not only in the neighborhood, but in the city of Jerusalem. Not only in the city of Jerusalem, but beyond that from other cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem. People were being brought, and everyone is being healed, and everyone is being delivered from unclean spirits. Now remember, all of this is happening after the apostles had been forbidden to do anything. They had been forbidden to do any of this. They had been told to stop all of this. They had literally been confronted by the authorities who were so disturbed. It was demanded of them that they stop all preaching and all of this that was essentially turning the world upside down in their words. But they didn’t, of course. It just inspired them to be more bold and the power burst was really astonishing.

Please note would you, verse 12, “At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people. At the hands of the signs of the apostles.” Listen, this is not a miracle-working church. This is a church with miracle-working apostles. There’s a big difference. You have to make that distinction. Scripture makes that distinction.

Our Lord Himself, you will remember back early in His ministry when He called together His apostles, gave them authority over disease and authority over demons. He gave them the power to do miracles. That is why the apostle Paul speaks of the signs of an apostle, the signs of an apostle. There were specific signs that identified an apostle, and not just anybody could manifest those kinds of signs. Signs, wonders, mighty deeds, He told the Corinthians, were the signs of an apostle.

There were only 12 apostles. One was defective, that is Judas. He’s eliminated. Matthias takes his place. We saw that at the beginning of Acts. Paul is later on added as an apostle out of due season. The miracle ministry of signs and wonders was apostolic, and it was epic. The sick – go to verses 15 and 16 – were being healed. People were coming from absolutely everywhere. The streets must have presented a strange picture in those days.

Now remember, the church has exploded. There are thousands of believers, and they don’t have anywhere to go. So when they want to have an assembly, they make one wherever they are in whatever segments they happened to be gathered. Maybe they came together all of them on the Lord’s Day likely in the temple courtyard and took over the temple. But the streets are alive with these believers, and the apostles are moving among them, all of the apostles. Now the list is complete at 12 because Matthias has taken Judas’ place. We can assume he also had the power that the other 11 had.

They are so convinced of their power, their power is so visible that they believe, the people believe that even the shadow of the apostles would heal them. When Peter comes by, they try to get ill people into his shadow. Now, the Word doesn’t say that his shadow healed anybody, okay? It doesn’t say that. It says the people believed his shadow could heal. If you go back in history, it’s kind of interesting. You find some ancient documents about the belief that the shadow of a powerful person could influence another person.

Parents, for example, would run to draw their children away from the shadow of someone they feared, away from the shadow of someone they disliked. Children would be pushed into the shadow of an influential, noble person. So maybe this is just part of those kinds of superstition, but it does let us know that they knew the immense power of Peter and the other apostles.

This is only for the beginning of the church age. Miracles were only a part of the beginning. Why? To validate them as the preachers of the truth since they were speaking the Word of God. They claimed to be speaking the Word of God. How do you know they are? There’s no New Testament, so how do we know they’re speaking the Word of God? We know because they have divine power. Those are the emblems, the badges of truth.

The apostles don’t last, and they fade. In the book of Acts, they fade. When they fade, the miracles disappear as well. As you get to the end of the book of Acts, there are no more miracles. The miracles are fading even with the apostle Paul still around. He’s leaving people sick here and there. They had a testimony at the beginning. Then as the Lord, the Holy Spirit began to reveal truth, and it began to be written down and circulated among the churches, they were validated by the Scriptures; not by miracles.

We have to say this: the church had people listening to its message because of the evidence of its power. Now listen, you say, “How does that apply to us?” It applies to us, dear friends because, listen, we have the record of all that power in Holy Scripture. We don’t have apostles running around doing miracles. We have a lot of false apostles running around doing false miracles, but we also have the complete divinely-inspired heaven-sent record of all the apostolic miracles on the pages of the New Testament.

So we own the record of the power of God displayed in the church. That’s a powerful reality. We also possess the power of the Holy Spirit who is doing the marvelous work of conversion. But just the fact that these miracles occurred then, doesn’t mean that we can’t draw from them. We can. You say, “Well, what if people don’t believe the Scripture?” Oh, I don’t expect them to. Do you? I don’t expect anybody to believe the Scripture. Why? Because, “The natural man understandeth not the things of God. They are foolishness to him. They are spiritually discerned. He’s spiritually dead.” I don’t expect them to believe the Scripture, but they can’t be saved unless they do. But they won’t unless God does a divine miracle and opens their eyes the Scripture comes alive. All the power displayed in the early church becomes as alive today to that person who sees the truth as it was to those people in that city. In fact, even more so. There were a lot of people who saw the miracles and never really believed. I see all those miracles. I’ve read all about them. I’ve written all about them. I’ve studied them. They’re part of the fabric of my faith as much as if I was there. Aren’t they yours?

Well, so those are the first two things. To make evangelism effective, a pure church and a powerful record, a powerful record. If you want a comparison, go back and look at the history of Islam and compare the record of Muhammad, a mass killer, sexually-deviated with the record of the New Testament, with Christ and the apostles. So, power belongs to the church and the record is established in Holy Scripture, and I promise you Scripture cannot be broken. Scripture will defend itself.

I’m sure you’ve noticed this over the years. I don’t spend a lot of time defending the Bible, trying to make you believe it. You don’t even question it. You don’t question it. You come here. I stand up here and thank you for coming all the time. It’s pretty amazing to hear somebody talk. You come all the time and you sit there and you not only hear what I’m saying, but you feel the truth of it, don’t you? You feel the weight of Scripture. The more I go into it and the more I try to unpack it and make it clear to you, the more that it rings true and consistent.

So you embrace all those miracles and all those displays of power, and that’s part of the body of reality that you believe in. We believe in miracles, apostolic miracles in the establishment of the messiahship of Jesus Christ and His deity and the authority and inspiration of the apostles. Another way to say this is evangelism is built on a pure church and a pure divine revelation; a commitment to holiness and a commitment to divine authority and Scripture. If you’re loose on any of those two things, you’re short circuiting evangelism. We haven’t even gotten to talking about the message yet, but we may. We may.

There’s a third point, but my time is gone, and I didn’t get as far as I wanted. But the third point, and this is a necessary reality for the church: persecution. Purity, power, and persecution. Persecution is inevitable. Persecution is predictable. You come to verse 17 and immediately, “The high priest rose up.” This is so predictable. “Along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees who ran the temple operation and the Sanhedrin), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles, put them in a public jail.”

Listen, you cannot be effective in evangelism unless you anticipate the persecution. You may not get thrown in jail. I have only been thrown in jail once, and that was when I was in the South in kind of a heat of the night sheriff and I was preaching in black high schools around the South. Some sheriff took me down to jail and took all of my money because he thought I was stirring up civil rights during the Civil Rights Movement, which I wasn’t. I was preaching the gospel with my friend John Perkins.

That’s the only time I’ve ever been hauled in, followed a police car to a jail for preaching. I’ve escaped that, but I haven’t escaped animosity, and I kind of expect it. I think, too, there have been times and seasons in the life of the church when persecution ebbs and flows. We’ve had the best of it in the western world because we’ve been under the Christian influence for so long. Of course, that’s all gone now. So we should expect the persecution to get elevated pretty fast. It can come many, many ways.

The world cannot stand a pure church. It cannot stand a powerful church drawing its power out of biblical authority. It becomes a horrible irritant to the system. More and more at this time. So persecution is predictable, and maybe more predicable right now in our lifetime than ever before. This doesn’t threaten our evangelism. This will threaten cowardly people, but it will not threaten the people of God, the true church, and those who are bold in Christ, right? So it’s no shock. We’ve escaped it for a while because of strong sort of residual Christian influence in the morality of our country. That is all gone in the apostatizing of America, so we expect that. Well, they got it right away in the early church. We would have more of it if we were bolder, if Christians were bolder. But we’ll have to save that discussion of persecution for next time.