

V.O.C. November 2019

November 17, 2019: Jesus protects His church

Dear Listeners,

Again, I may draw your attention to the book of the Acts of the apostles. We have seen so far that Jesus continues His work, though He ascended into heaven and remains out of sight. The Acts of the apostles, therefore, are actually the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ through the apostles. The Lord Jesus is gathering, preserving, and defending His church through the proclamation of the gospel. The apostles proclaim the only name given under heaven by which anyone may be saved. This proclamation resulted in many followers who believed this gospel; it also triggered a reaction of resistance and opposition. Last week we saw this opposition coming from the outside, even from the rulers and leaders of the Jews; today we see that Satan also uses forces of sin and evil inside the church to attack the church, disrupt the peace, and undermine the work of Jesus!

In the congregation at Jerusalem the Lord Jesus had shown a lot of what His kingdom is like: it is a kingdom of love and care, of watching over and looking after each other! True believers have their life and possessions in common with each other, sharing with each other what God has entrusted to them. That wonderful effect of the people's faith and conversion, however, Satan threatened severely! In the congregation there were two members, a husband and wife, named Ananias and Sapphira. They have many possessions but they used it for their own honour and reputation. They deceive the Lord and thereby the congregation as well. Satan shows himself to be the same still as he manifested himself in Paradise; his favourite instrument is the lie. When people aren't honest, they right away undermine and disturb the sense of unity in the congregation! That's what happened when this couple pretended that they were giving their whole possession to the church while they only gave a part of it, just to make an impression!

The Holy Spirit exposed their deception and lie so that Peter sees through their wrongful giving. They're punished with death because they lied against people not only but especially against the Holy Spirit of God! Why such a severe punishment though? That seems so threatening, considering that everyone at one time or other has been a bit deceptive or dishonest. What it shows though is the fact that the congregation of Jesus Christ is so precious in God's eyes. She is holy, the dwelling place of God! Anyone who deceives the congregation deceives God! It offends Him so much that they deserve death! This is how the Lord Jesus protects His church at the beginning of the history of the church. We better know, it shows, and be warned, it teaches, that anyone who attacks, hurts, or undermines the congregation of the Lord Jesus, touches the apple of God's eye!

It's remarkable, then, to see that this event with Ananias and Sapphira did not become a deterrent for people to believe in Jesus and join the congregation. On the contrary, despite of it the congregation grew and increased. Yes, the acts of the apostles attracted a lot of attention and showed in their words and deeds, and the effects of their presence, that they were servants of the Lord Jesus: just as with Jesus people were healed even when only the shadow of Peter fell on them! They didn't have to

do anything for it; all it showed the power of Jesus entrusted to the apostles as well so that people would realize that in them Jesus continued His work! Although this may not be seen today any longer, still it's also true today that when people see true believers in their works of the Spirit or in their fruit of the Spirit, they attract the attention! The fruit of the Spirit becomes evident in their love for God and the neighbour, their peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control. They share their comfort and encouragement with others; they show it to others that the grace of God heals life!

It's truly remarkable when you see how the acts of the apostles and the fruits of faith of the believers had an impact on life in Jerusalem. On the one hand it drew many to the truth which is in Jesus, when they believe the gospel, on the other hand the opposition and resistance drives people away from Jerusalem outside of the territory of the Jews. This happened especially after the death of one of the deacons, Stephen, whom the Jews stoned to death because he preached against the practices and sinfulness of the Jews, of their rulers and leaders especially. That's when persecutions started against the followers of Jesus. Then we see the gospel cross the borders of the country: Philip preached the good news in Samaria, to the Samaritans that is, who weren't real Jews but a mixture of Jews and Gentiles and who had never been accepted by the Jews. They received the gospel with joy! They also received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit!

Again, though what we see happening in Samaria and among the Samaritans was so beautiful, Satan was ready there too to disturb this work of the Lord Jesus. There was a man, named Simon, who was very impressed by the power of the Holy Spirit and the effects of faith in the life of people, as well about the healings he saw the apostles bring. He wanted to use this interest in the gospel and the effects on the people for his own benefit. He saw it as a source of power and money. While Jesus came to save people from their sins and renew them in His image, Simon was interested in the opposite: power for himself! Jesus' power, however, seeks a new life, a justification by faith, and the renewal of life, so to set people free from the powers of sin. This gift of life and salvation isn't for sale but can only be received by faith, through grace! Simon was after money and power, honour and glory for himself...

Thus, we see that what happened when the gospel went out among the Jews, it also happened when the Gentiles came to faith. Yes, it happens all the time, today still too, that the battle from the beginning between the seed of Satan and the Seed of the Son of God continues to this day! Inside the church the gospel often meets with opposition from people's personal ideas and theories, people's rules and regulations, while outside the church there is greed, power, and occult powers that come in the way to discredit the work of the Lord Jesus. That kind of resistance in man's flesh and opposition from man's self-designed religion still hampers the growth and progress of the church. Yet, we may thankfully confess that to this day the Lord Jesus has protected His church, preserving the truth in her, and in the meantime continuing the increase of His church and the coming of His kingdom! He uses the proclamation of the gospel for this so that by His Spirit and Word people come to faith, to the renewal of their life, and to the show of fruits of faith and the fruit of the Spirit as living members of His church! Today also!