**STILL NEWER AND EVEN MORE IMPROVED! IS. 61, ACTS 5:12-32, EPH. 2:8-10, JAN. 15/23.**

Last week we finished saying **Luke laid it out big** in Acts 5. Soon after Jesus had ascended the apostles went throughout Jerusalem healing “all” who were sick & tormented by evil spirits. The high priest and Sadducees were filled with jealousy so they arrested the apostles & put them in jail. “But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail & brought them out. ‘Go, stand in the temple courts & **tell the people the full message of this new life**.’”

 Well that’s pretty amazing isn’t it! An angel of the Lord frees the apostles from prison. And the story is even stranger than that. In the morning when the Sanhedrin asked the officers to bring them out, the cells were all locked with the guards outside the cells, but there was no sign of the apostles. How’d that happen?

 Now you’d think the apostles might run away and hide so they wouldn’t be busted again by the Sanhedrin. (Though the Sanhedrin were a religious group, they had power to arrest and detain as if they were police.) **But the apostles didn’t run**. They went right back into the thick of things, right back into the temple and started or resumed teaching the people.

 Well **what do you think they would have been teaching** the people? I think it’s fair to say that since they were dealing with a “churched” people who frequented the temple regular-ly, they were probably showing them from the Old Testament, which of course was the full Bible at the time, how Jesus was the fulfillment of all the prophets had said & written about Him.

 **But there’s more to it than that**. When Jesus was beginning His ministry, do you remember how Philip went & told Nathaniel he’d found the One written about, spoken about by Moses—the Messiah. That in itself is huge. The Jews hadn’t heard anything from any prophet since Malachi, until John the Baptist appeared—a span of 400 years of divine silence.

 OK, **so now the Messiah’s here, so what?** Truly, so what? **What would happen? What would change? How would life be different**—if at all? It’s interesting to ponder if the phrase, “We never did it that way before?” was uttered by any or many.

**Was Jesus going to come as the military might** & right of God & blow away their Roman oppressors and re-establish the kingdom of Israel? Would Jesus become king?

And this is **what God wanted to set straight right from the beginning**. **He sent an angel and miraculously released the apostles to go into the temple court and tell the people the full message of this new life**. So they weren’t running, they weren’t afraid, they weren’t timid. They didn’t stop to get instructions on what to say. They didn’t go to evangelism classes. They just told the full message of this new life. **If you were asked to do that, what would you tell?**

You might say, “Well, it’s pretty hard to capture everything that “full message of new life entails.” I agree. It’s virtually impossible to understand, let alone explain God’s way. But that said, I don’t think it’s beyond us to easily take a very good stab at it. You might start with **Isaiah—chapter 61 would be a good beginning**:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”…For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In My faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Or you could listen to **Jesus’ own words** from Luke 7, when John’s disciples came to ask Him if He was the One who was to come or should they expect someone else? He answered:

“Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of Me.”

Of course we could pick a thousand other texts and verses. But these 2 provide a pretty good overview. **Tell the good news** to **everyone**—and don’t forget the poor. The Gospel is great news for them. There’s going to be **a day of reckoning**. Those who are **sick will be healed**. The **dead will be raised to new life**, those who are **imprisoned**—by jails or by mental suffering **will be freed**. Those who **mourn will** be able to **rejoice**. **God will comfort you**. He will **put an end to your darkness**. **Justice**—real justice—**will come**, and **evil**, like robbery and mistreatment **will end.** Jesus is faithful; those who believe in Him will be rewarded. He promises you this forever.

**How does this full new life happen?** Eph. 2:8-10 says **it’s by grace. It’s a gift of God**. You can’t earn it. It comes by faith in God. And even this faith isn’t from you. It’s a gift of God too. So you’ve got nothing to boast about. You can never earn this new life, nor can you save yourself. It’s a gift of God. **But once you’ve been saved** by Jesus, then, as His workmanship, you are created to do all manner of good works that God prepared for you even before you were born!

**How would you sum it up?** New life? Praise God. Thank Jesus for exchanging places with us—taking our sin and giving us His righteousness. Serve Him joyfully and relentlessly. Love God and love others.

 And getting back to the passage from Acts 5, **there’s more to this new life. Live large! Live boldly**. The apostles were rounded up and brought back for questioning by the high priest. We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. **Sounds like today**, doesn’t it. Oh, you can’t speak about Jesus; oh, you can’t speak about Christmas; oh, you can’t talk about Easter…

 **Peter’s answer? “We must obey God rather than men**…God exalted Jesus…as…Saviour that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins…We are witnesses of these things…” **You also are witnesses of these things. Every day you see God at work in your own life**. It’s not difficult. Just speak about what you have been blessed with. **Because Christ has been raised from the dead, we too may live a new life (Ro. 6:4).** You are, in fact, a new creation. **In Christ, you are a new creation**. The old is gone; the new is come (2 Cor. 5:17).

 **There’s another aspect of newness** I want to cover before we close. Eph. 4:23, 24:

“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

 **Put on the new self**. Just like you’d put on a new shirt or pair of shoes. Put it on. That’s literally what the Greek means. And so if you put that on, **it means good-bye to** lying, to sinning when you’re angry (Being angry’s not a sin, but acting out is.), to stealing, to unwholesome talk (I love that phrase—if it’s negative, don’t let it escape your mouth!). Instead, “speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Now that’s new life! But there’s more—just like an infomercial! New life means getting rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, slander, and every form of malice. Got bitterness? Get rid of it. Chuck it. Got anger issues? Toss them. Got bad words or thoughts about someone? Ditch them.

 **If I get rid** of those things, what’s left? Replace them with kindness and compassion, for-giving each other just as Christ forgave you and imitate God. **Now that’s new life! Pass it on!**