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Turning the World Upside Down / Miracles; The Apostles Perform Signs and Wonders; Purity; Unity; Power / Acts 5:12–16

Acts 5:12-16 shows us some keys to the accomplishment of the church's mission.

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## Introduction

John MacArthur wrote these words:

A perennial problem the church of Jesus Christ faces is a lack of focus on its mission (John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1994], 159).

He goes on to note that widespread confusion exists over what is the primary mission of the church.

Some churches insist that the mission of the church is to liberate the poor through social justice.

Other churches claim that the mission of the church is to impact the culture for good.

Still other churches believe that the mission of the church is to love all people and do good to as many as possible.

Then, more biblical churches stress worship, fellowship, and education. While each of these goals is important, none of them is the primary mission of the church. “Indeed,” MacArthur notes, “every one of them could be better accomplished in heaven” (John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1994], 159).

So, what is the primary mission of the church?

Jesus answered that question in his last commandment that he gave to his church in [Matthew 28:19-20a](#). He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

The primary mission of the church is to make disciples.

The church is to carry on the mission of Jesus who said in [Luke 19:10](#) that he “came to seek and to save the lost.”

Making disciples is the only goal that cannot be done in heaven because there will be no unbelievers in heaven.

Jesus emphasized this mission just before his ascension into heaven. He told his followers that they would be his “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#)).

The church in the first century saw explosive growth.

When the Apostle Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, “there were added that day about three thousand souls” ([Acts 2:41](#)).

In the days following Pentecost, Luke noted that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” ([Acts 2:47](#)).

A few weeks later, after Peter’s second recorded sermon, we read in [Acts 4:4](#), “But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”

This is the last time in the book of Acts that Luke recorded the number of disciples that belonged to the church.

Why was no count given of the size of the church in the months and years that followed?

No count was given because the church grew too rapidly for them to keep count.

Listen to Luke’s record of the church’s explosive growth in the rest of Acts:

- [Acts 5:14](#): “And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”
- [Acts 6:7](#): “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

- [Acts 9:31](#): “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”
- [Acts 12:24](#): “But the word of God increased and multiplied.”
- [Acts 16:5](#): “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.”
- [Acts 19:20](#): “So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

The church was so effective in accomplishing its mission that the Jews said of Paul and Silas when they preached in Thessalonica, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” ([Acts 17:6](#)).

Why did the church grow so rapidly in the first century?

What were some keys to the accomplishment of the church’s mission?

## Scripture

Let’s read [Acts 5:12-16](#):

**<sup>12</sup> Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. <sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, <sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.**

## Lesson

[Acts 5:12-16](#) shows us some keys to the accomplishment of the church’s mission.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Church Accomplishes Its Mission by Purity (5:12b-14)

## 2. The Church Accomplishes Its Mission by Power (5:12a; 15-16)

### I. The Church Accomplishes Its Mission by Purity (5:12b-14)

First, the church accomplishes its mission by purity.

Luke said in verse 12b, **“And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico.”** The *New International Version* puts it this way, “And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade.”

**Solomon’s Portico**, also known as Solomon’s Colonnade, was on the eastern side of the temple. It faced the Court of the Gentiles. It was the place where Peter preached his second recorded sermon (see [Acts 3:11ff](#)). Jesus also preached one of his messages there (see [John 10:23ff](#)). **Solomon’s Portico** became the regular gathering place for the new disciples who met there daily for prayer and worship.

Luke then noted in verse 13, **“None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.”** Why would none of the rest join the disciples?

This is where knowing the context is important.

In the previous pericope, we learned about the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. You remember that they lied about how much money they were giving to the church. They sold a piece of property and said that they were giving the entire proceeds of the sale to the church when in fact they only gave a portion to the church.

God’s holy judgment fell immediately upon each of them and they died instantly because of their sin.

Luke recorded in [Acts 5:11](#), “And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.”

So there was a holy fear not only among the disciples but also among the unbelievers in Jerusalem. They knew that God did not wink at sin. God was a holy God and sin was a terrible affront to him.

God uses churches that are pure to accomplish his mission.

God does not use churches that ignore sin, downplay sin, or condone impurity in its midst.

That is why churches that encounter unrepentant sin in their midst must exercise discipline to maintain their purity.

Jesus gave the clearest and most extensive teaching on how to exercise church discipline. He taught in [Matthew 18:15-20](#):

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Sadly, many churches will not exercise discipline against unrepentant sinners. Some pastors won't even mention the word "sin" in their sermons. They will talk instead of "struggle" or "failure" or something like that.

They are concerned that talking about sin will keep people away from the church.

But did you notice what happened in that first-century church?

As a result of God's judgment upon sin in the church, Luke said in verse 14, **"And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women."** The church's explosive growth continued as **men and women** turned to the Lord in repentance and faith.

It is important to note that the church is made up of disciples who are each committed to a life of purity.

Robert Murray McCheyne (1813 – 1843) was a minister in the Church of Scotland from 1835 to 1843. He died before his 30th birthday. He was an extraordinary pastor. He gave the following advice to a fellow pastor:

Do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God’s sword, his instrument—I trust a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God (Andrew A. Bonar and R.M. McCheyne, *Memoir and Remains of R.M. McCheyne*, electronic ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1996], 95).

The church accomplishes its mission by purity.

My dear brother and sister in Christ, Jesus will grow his church here if you and I are committed to a life of purity.

## II. The Church Accomplishes Its Mission by Power (5:12a; 15-16)

And second, the church accomplishes its mission by power.

Having purged the church of sin by the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, God continued to bless the church. Luke said in verse 12a, **“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.”**

What are **“signs and wonders”**? They are sometimes called “miracles.” Commentator Derek Thomas writes, “The English word ‘miracle,’ derived from the Latin *miraculum*, means ‘something that evokes wonder’ ” (Derek W. H. Thomas, *Acts*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011], 131).

What God was doing in the church did indeed evoke wonder among the people.

But what was the purpose of **“signs and wonders”**?

There were two purposes for the **“signs and wonders”** that are recorded in the Bible.

First, they pointed to some specific spiritual truth about God’s person and work. They were not merely done for the benefit of the recipient of the miracle.

So, for example, the spiritual truth that was being pointed to when a person was healed was that God has power over sickness. Almost all miracles point to the spiritual truth that God has power over disease, death, demons, nature, and sin.

And second, the purpose of **“signs and wonders”** confirmed the persons through whom they were done to be authentic messengers of God. The person had no power in himself (except Jesus, of course). Rather, God was simply working through a particular person to authenticate him as his messenger.

There were four great periods in history in which there was a preponderance of **“signs and wonders.”** These periods were during the ministries of the following persons:

1. Moses and Joshua,
2. Elijah and Elisha,
3. Jesus, and
4. The apostles.

There were isolated instances of miracles at other times. However, a significant number of miracles occurred during these four periods.

Now that the canon of Scripture is closed, there is no longer any need for miracles today. There is not going to be any new revelation from God, and so we don't need to look for miracles today.

Is God able to perform a miracle today?

Of course, he can. He is God.

However, miracles are not necessary today to authenticate his message or his messengers.

Luke went on to say that the believers **“even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them”** (v. 15).

This is an interesting statement, isn't it? The verse does not say that Peter's shadow healed anyone. It simply implies that the people believed that his shadow might heal them.

Clearly, the power to heal did not lie in Peter or his shadow.

The power to heal was with God.

God had the power to heal anyone. And he used whatever means he decreed.

Luke also told us in verse 16, **“The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”**

What a wonderful encouragement to the disciples! All the people who came for healing were healed.

This is also the first record of the church spreading beyond Jerusalem. The mission of making disciples was beginning to spread to “all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#)).

“Well, pastor,” perhaps some of you are thinking, “I can see how the first-century church accomplished its mission by power. But you have just said that there are no signs and wonders today. So, how does the church accomplish its mission by power today?”

That is a great question!

Let me remind you of some of the passages I referenced earlier:

- [Acts 6:7](#): “And *the word of God* continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”
- [Acts 12:24](#): “But *the word of God* increased and multiplied.”
- [Acts 19:20](#): “So *the word of the Lord* continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

The power that the church has today is *the word of God*. The Spirit of God takes the word of God and makes disciples.

The church today accomplishes its mission by the power of God’s word.



## Conclusion

I started this message with the following quote from John MacArthur, “A perennial problem the church of Jesus Christ faces is a lack of focus on its mission.”

Let me tell you the Parable of the Life-Saving Station:

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a little life-saving station. The building was primitive, and there was just one boat, but the members of the life-saving station were committed and kept a constant watch over the sea. When a ship went down, they unselfishly went out day or night to save the lost. Because so many lives were saved by that station, it became famous.

Consequently, many people wanted to be associated with the station to give their time, talent, and money to support its important work. New boats were bought, new crews were recruited, and a formal training session was offered. As the membership in the life-saving station grew, some of the members became unhappy that the building was so primitive and that the equipment was so outdated. They wanted a better place to welcome the survivors pulled from the sea. So they replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged and newly decorated building.

Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members. They met regularly and when they did, it was apparent how they loved one another. They greeted each other, hugged each other, and shared with one another the events that had been going on in their lives. But fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions; so they hired lifeboat crews to do this for them.

About this time, a large ship was wrecked off of the coast, and the hired crews brought into the life-saving station boatloads of cold, wet, dirty, sick, and half-drowned people. Some of them had black skin, and some had yellow skin. Some could speak English well, and some could hardly speak it at all. Some were first-class cabin passengers of the ship, and some were deckhands.

The beautiful meeting place became a place of chaos. The plush carpets got dirty. Some of the exquisite furniture got scratched. So the property committee immediately had a shower built outside the house where the victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a rift in the membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities, for they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal fellowship of the members. Other members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all those various kinds of people who would be shipwrecked, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. And do you know what? That is what they did.

As the years passed, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a place to meet regularly for fellowship, for committee meetings, and for special training sessions about their mission, but few went out to the drowning people. The drowning people were no longer welcomed in that new life-saving station. So another life-saving station was founded further down the coast. History continued to repeat itself. And if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a number of adequate meeting places with ample parking and plush carpeting. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown (Thomas Wedel, "Ecumenical Review," October, 1953, paraphrased in *Heaven Bound Living*, Knofel Stanton, Standard, 1989, pp. 99-101).

Friends, the mission of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is to make disciples.

I pray that we will never lose focus on our mission. Amen.