

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

12. A PATTERN FOR EVANGELISM

Aida Skripnikova was born in 1941 in Lennigrad when the Russian people were fighting to free themselves from their Axis invaders. History tells us, that the enemy was driven out, but that did not bring true freedom. In the Autumn of 1961 Aida came to know Christ as a nineteen-year old, and with her new faith came the impulse to share it with others. Aida purchased some postcards with a beautiful picture by Claude Lorain representing a harbour at sunrise, and then she wrote a poem on the reverse side. The poem expressed her perception of life and the need to find God. The poem was entitled: " Happy New Year ! 1962." It went:

*" Our years fly past,
One after another, unnoticed
Grief and sadness disappear,
They are carried away by life.
This world, the earth, is so transient
Everything in it comes to an end.
Life is important.
Don't be happy-go-lucky !
What answer will you give your Creator ?
What awaits you, my friend, beyond the grave ?
Answer this question, while light remains.
Perhaps tomorrow, before God*

*You will appear to give an answer for everything
Think deeply about this.
For you are not on this earth forever.
Perhaps tomorrow, you will break
Forever your links with this world !
SEEK GOD WHILE HE IS TO BE FOUND."*

Aida then took her postcards and stood on the Nevski Prospect, and handed out her cards to passers-by. She was, of course, arrested. In April 1962 she was tried by a Communist Court. She was exiled from Leningrad and lost her job as a lab assistant. She was arrested again in 1965 and was sent to labour camp for a year. In 1968 she was arrested again and was sent to a labour camp for three more years. Perhaps Aida in her short Christian life had never read our passage, but she obeyed the instinct of her heart and in the midst of unbelievable oppression shared the message of the Gospel. You see regardless how hostile and oppressive our surroundings, no matter how philistine the workplace, how callous the students: or how neurotic the neighbours we are meant to share Christ by life and word.

My is this not the primary goal of the church ? Did our Lord not charge us, " *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" (Matt 28:19) Some tell us that the church should lead the crusade for social justice for the poor and downtrodden.

Others see the church as a political force to help change the culture. Still others view their church as a private club, where they can socialise with their friends. Yet not one of these things is the church's primary goal here on earth. For the church's primary goal on earth is evangelism. It is to carry on the work begun by the Lord Jesus, whose mission was " *to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Lk 19:10) Now the Early Church understood its purpose clearly. The believers never lost sight of their calling to be Christ's witnesses " *both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" (1:8) Their zeal and effectiveness resulted in explosive growth. On the Day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, " *there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*" (2:41)

In the days following Pentecost, " *the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*" (2:47)

By the conclusion of Peter's second sermon the number of men in the church had risen to 5,000. (4:4) And that is the last specific number of believers recorded in Acts: from that time on the church grew too rapidly to keep count. (Acts 5:14) speaks of " *multitudes both of men and women added to the Lord.*" (Acts 6:7) adds that

" *the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.*" (Acts 9:31) says " *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified: and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.*" (Acts 11:21) says " *a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord,*" in Antioch, while (11:24)

records that " *much people was added unto the Lord,*" through the ministry of Barnabas in that city.

Now what did the church do to contribute to this remarkable growth ? How did the church expand so rapidly despite the determined opposition of the Jewish authorities ? Well, I believe (Acts 5) presents to us: " **A PATTERN FOR EVANGELISM.**" We have here *The Early Church Pattern for Evangelism.* Look at (Acts 5) and notice:

(1) REALITY

Do you recall what the Risen Lord said to the church at Sardis ? " *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*" (3:1) Or as another translation puts it, " *You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.*" They had **Reputation**, but no **Reality**. They had all the signs of dynamic ministry. But their inward condition was dead. They were living off yesterdays spiritual momentum. A cold, formal rigidness had set in. My is this church like Sardis ? This church has got a name for its standards: its stand: its separation but is that all we have got ? Are we living on past glory ? Have we outward appearance but no inward reality ? Are we doctrinally sound but inwardly dead ? You see the first thing that struck you about The Early Church was ITS REALITY:

(a) THERE WAS REAL PURITY:

Look at (5:11) Do you recall what happened ? God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead for pretending a full

dedication which they had not made. And this action of God was meant to impress upon the church the seriousness of the sins of the saints. It had that effect as (5:11) indicates. Indeed in (5:14) we read, "*No one else dared join them even though they were highly regarded by the people.*" You see the news of what had happened spread quickly through the Christian community and throughout the city. Here was an unrecognised dimension. The church was not only a **HAPPY PLACE**, a place where one could learn of sins forgiven and peace with God, where people could gather to worship, and share all things in common. It was also a **HOLY PLACE**. Let people beware.

For here was a church so operating in the power of the Spirit that sin was an exception rather than a rule. Liars could not stand this church in Jerusalem. (a) My to be useful to the Lord, an individual must be pure. (2 Tim 2:19-21) No one stated that truth any more clearly than the nine-teenth-century Scottish pastor and evangelist Robert Murray McCheyne. He gave the following advice to a young man entering the ministry:

" Do not forget the culture of the inner man I mean of the heart. How diligently the calvary officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp: every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's word, His instrument I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection's 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 hands of God."

My what is true of believers individually, is true of the church collectively. The church that would reach the world must be pure: it must be a church that deals with sin. That's why God's dramatic judgment fell on Ananias and Sapphira, because God is concerned about a PURE CHURCH. (1 Cor 5:1 Titus 1:13 1 Tim 5:20) Why is it that to-day the church is making little impact on society ? Why is the church ignored and treated as of no account ? Is it because that the world looks at us and sees no difference between us and itself ? (a)

(b) THERE WAS REAL PROGRESS:

Look at (5:14) Despite the attacks of Satan the people were still unified (5:12) magnified (5:13) and multiplied. (5:14) Multitudes were added to the Lord, and for the first time, Luke mentions the salvation of women. Both in his Gospel and in Acts, Luke has a great deal to say about women and their relationship to Christ and the church. There are at least a dozen references in Acts to women, as Luke shows the role women played in the apostolic church. But my can you imagine what a place Solomon's porch must have been in those days ? This portico was a roofed colonnade that resembled a long porch, stretching along the eastern side of the Temple courtyard.

What a place it must have been ! What enormous crowds must have assembled there ! For there an ungrieved Holy Spirit was doing His work unhindered and unhampered, and souls were being saved.

My the Lord has not changed. His work on earth is vast. It is being carried out in all parts of the globe by a multitude of believers and every day He adds new souls to the church. If we could only see that vast work as Heaven sees it we would be encouraged. The Holy Spirit is at work. The Lord is building His church, and if He is now working like this, in our midst, perhaps there is sin, somewhere that is choking the channel.

(a) (b)

(c) THERE WAS REAL POWER:

Now I want you to note that (5:12b - 14) form a parenthesis. So (5:15) resumes the thought begun in the first half of (5:12) Now these " *signs and wonders,*" (*teras: semeion*) were God's way of authenticating the ministry of the Apostles. (Rom 15:18-19 2 Cor 12:12 Heb 2:14) When the Lord Jesus performed miracles during His ministry on earth, He had three purposes in mind. (1) To show compassion and meet human need: (2) To present His credentials as the Son of God: (3) To convey spiritual truth. For example, when He fed the 5,000, the miracle met their physical need, revealed Him as the Son of God, and gave the Saviour opportunity to preach a message about the Bread of Life. (Jn 6:35) Now my the apostolic miracles followed a similar pattern.

Peter and John healed the crippled beggar and met his need, but Peter used that miracle to preach a salvation message and to prove to the people and the council that he and John were indeed the servants of the living God.

You see one of the qualifications for an apostle was that had seen the Risen Christ (1:22 1 Cor 9:1) and, since nobody can claim that experience today, there are no apostles in the church. My the apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) and the pastors: teachers: and evangelists are building on it. Now if there are no apostles, there can be no " **signs of an apostle,**" as are found in the Book of the Acts. (2 Cor 12:12) This does not mean that God is limited and can no longer perform miracles for His people ! But it does mean that the need for confirming miracles has passed away. My we now have the completed Word of God and we test teachers by their messages and not by miracles. (1 Jn 2:18-120 4:1-6)

These were days of mighty power when God was speaking to Israel and telling them that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah and Saviour. " *For the Jews require a sign,*" (1 Cor 1:22) and God gave signs to them. So there was **REAL POWER.** (1)

(2) RESISTANCE

The English martyr Hugh Latimer said, " *Whenever you see persecution, there is more than a probability that truth is on the persecuted side.*" A pure, powerful church will inevitably provoke a hostile reaction from the satanic world system. Successful Christians and churches will make waves, and the world and Satan will retaliate with persecution. There was:

(a) INDIGNATION HERE:

Look at (5:17) Now, remember that while the Pharisees led the opposition to Christ in the gospels, the Sadducees were the chief opponents of the early church.

And they " were filled with indignation," or jealousy. They were jealous at the church's popularity with the people. (5:13) Jealousy is always an ugly word.

(Prov 6:34) It is by nature destructive. These Sadducee leaders were envious of the popularity of the apostles and were self-protective of their own prestige. ***" The crowds should be gathering around us not them."***

And when their anger poured forth the apostles (this time all twelve) found themselves in the city jail. Can you imagine what it would be like ? If what we see later in Philippi is any indication, there were songs in the night. My the Jerusalem city jail had never seen anything like this, nor had the guards witnessed anything like what was about to happen. For there was:

(b) INTERVENTION HERE:

They were divinely delivered. (5:19) There is something humorous here. You see the Sadducees did not believe in angels. And yet here, right in their own city, there was angelic intervention. Why the angelic intervention ? God was teaching the Twelve that He can deliver His servants from the world's oppression anytime He sees fit. (12:6 16:26) You see this Divine Intervention was not only meant to free them, but to encourage them and us. The apostles now knew that God could deliver them from the world's clutches anytime, anywhere ! Ill: If church traditions are

correct, Matthew knew the reality of an angelic presence when he suffered martyrdom by the sword. So did Mark when he died in Alexandria after being dragged through the streets of the city. Luke experienced the same when he was hanged on a large olive tree in Greece. So it was with Peter when he was crucified upside down in Rome.

And on and on and on it goes. All of these died knowing that God can deliver His people anytime He wants. My when waves of persecution or trial come, God can deliver us **IF HE SO WILLS !** Not only were the apostles divinely delivered they were divinely commissioned. (5:20) They were to stand firm, and deliver the entire message of new life in Christ. What a picture ! The Sanhedrin was just getting out of bed, but Christ's ambassadors were already hard at work. With daybreak, they were back in the Temple on Solomon's Porch giving out the goods. Not surprisingly, they were arrested again and there was:

(c) INTERROGATION HERE:

(5:28 4:18) The truth is, **THEY** were the ones who said, " Crucify Him !" (Matt 27:22-23) and " Let His blood be on us and our children." (Matt 27:25) My most of us will never experience the degree of suffering endured by the first-century believers. But perhaps as a Christian you've been the target of ridicule or reproach.

How can you overcome ? By reminding yourself that **opposition may mean you're in God's will, not out of it.** My trouble struck the apostles because they

were obeying His will. And if people persecute you because you're following Christ, don't give up. Be like the apostles. For did you notice how they responded to this second wave of persecution ? They responded with:

(3) REAFFIRMATION

(5:29) Do you recall the answer of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they stood before Nebuchadnezzar ? (Daniel 3:16-18) They were fearless when faced with opposition !

Do you recall Athanasius said ? "*Athanasius, Athanasius against the world.*" Do you recall what Martin Luther said ?

" *Here I stand. I can do other. God help me.*" Do you recall what Aida Skripnikova said, "*Seek God while He may be found ?*" And here are the apostles reaffirming what they had already said. You see:

(a) *THEY DID NOT CHANGE THEIR CONVICTIONS:*

Look at (4:18-20) Now compare that with (5:29) They obeyed God and trusted Him to take care of the consequences. Now had they been diplomats instead of ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20) they could have pleased everyone and escaped a beating. But they stood firmly for the Lord and He honoured their courage and faith. "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" Tell me: are people pointing you in one direction while God's Word tells you to go another ? Are you prepared to obey God

rather than family: friends: or even bosses ? (a)

(b) *THEY DID NOT CHANGE THEIR MESSAGE:*

Look at (5:30-32) Now Peter had already indicted the leaders for the death of Christ (3:13-14 4:10) and now He is doing it again. But he does not stop with Christ's death. For once more he boldly affirms that Christ had been raised from the dead, and was exalted by God to Heaven. My ... Peters message to the Sanhedrin was powerful and convicting. He charged them with rejecting and executing their Messiah. He did not play on their emotions (20 minute appeal) or soften the confrontation, but he presented the truth. How did the Sanhedrin take it ? Well, the final word that I want to grasp here is the word:

(4) REACTION

Look at (4:33) Look at the different reactions to the ministry of the apostles.

(a) *THE COUNCIL FOCUSED ON MURDER:*

(5:33) How to get rid of the disciples ! This was an option. Why did they want to get rid of them ? Because the apostles had denied their doctrine by preaching the resurrection ! They had defied the authority of the Sanhedrin by preaching after they had ordered them to stop ! They had charged the Sanhedrin with executing the Messiah ! They were more popular than the Sanhedrin ! Was this not enough reason to get rid of the apostles ? My ... the knife had gone deep. (a) I

wonder at times are our gospel presentations definitive enough that the world **must** take note even if they reject our message ? If the gospel we preach is not convicting enough to make some men angry, is it convicting enough to bring them to salvation ? Some people think the Sanhedrin would have killed the apostles right on the spot if it were not for Gamaliel. For:

(b) THE DOCTOR FOCUSED ON MODERATION:

Now much can be said about this man, but suffice it is to say that he was easily the most prominent rabbi of that time. He was a scholar highly esteemed by the people. And what did Gamaliel say ? " **Wait and see.**" He was a fence-sitter. He was a pragmatist a poor substitute for being a good Biblical scholar. What was the result of it all ? The apostles were let off easy easy that is, if we think thirty-nine stripes is easy. (Deut 25:3) One by one they were whipped until the flesh parted. And one by one they experienced supernatural joy. (Matt 5:10-12) The opposition of men meant the approval of God, and it was actually a privilege to suffer for His name. (Phil 1:29) Did the threats and beatings stop them from witnessing for the Saviour ? Not at all for if the (a) (b)

(c) THE APOSTLES FOCUSED ON MISSION:

Look at (5:42) What a pattern for evangelism. Look at:

(1) The SEASON of their Testimony: " And daily." Ill:

D.L.Moody was fearless in his witness for Christ and sought to speak to at least one soul each day about the Saviour. He would ask, " Do you belong to Christ ? Do you love the Lord ?" Moody said, " I live for souls and eternity, I want to win some soul to Christ." My is your daily prayer " Lead me to some soul today ?"

(2) The SPHERE of their Testimony: " In the temple and in every house." After all, that was where the " religious," people were gathered, and it was easier to reach than there. Unlike congregations today, these people had no buildings that were set aside for worship and fellowship. Believers would meet in different homes, worshipping the Lord, listening to teaching and seeking to win the lost. (2:46 Rom 16:5 10-14) The Early Church took the Word of God right into the homes and we should follow their ministry. Ill: I don't know about the city, but years ago in the country they had cottage meetings. I had an old Granny who used to go around her neighbours and invite them into her home to hear the gospel. We use our homes for fellowship, why not for evangelism ? Did you notice:

(3) The MANNER of their Testimony: " They ceased not to **TEACH and PREACH.**" The word translated " preach," gives us our English word, " evangelise," and this is the first of 15 times it is used in the Acts. It simply means " to preach the gospel." But proclamation must be balanced with instruction (2:42) so that sinners know **WHAT** to believe, and the new converts understand **WHY** they believe. Notice, finally:

*(4) The SUBJECT of their Testimony: " And they ceased not Jesus Christ." Was that not the very name the Sanhedrin had condemned ? My exalt Christ: extol Christ: magnify Christ in your witness. (1:8 2 Cor 4:5) A **PATTERN FOR EVANGELISM.** Are we following it ? Ill: In his book The Gospel Blimp, the late Joe Bayly wrote: "**Jesus Christ didn't commit the Gospel to an advertising agency: He commissioned disciples.**" That commission still stands. In your life, is it commission or omission ?*