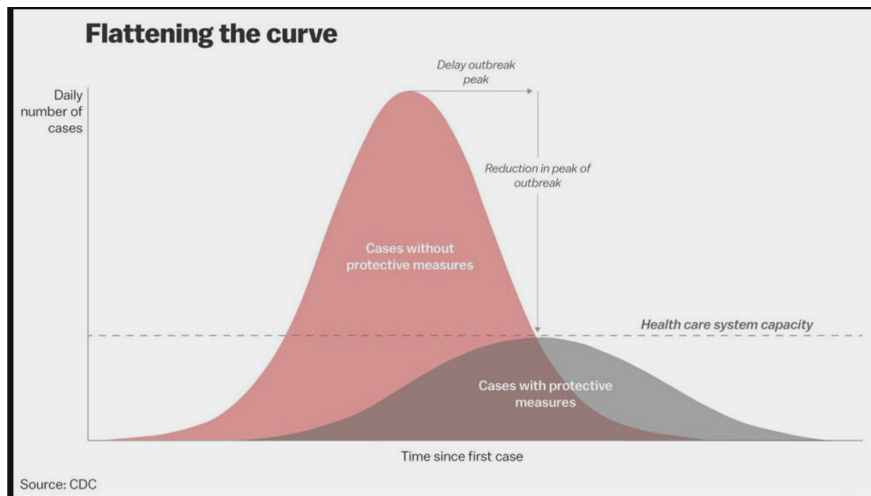


Acts 5:12-16

Outward Church: Life in the Shadow

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The Center for Disease Control (CDC) put out a graph that's been going around the internet. It's called "**flattening the curve**" and it shows two trajectories. The **first trajectory** shows what will happen when **people don't take protective measures seriously**—when we **don't practice social distancing and hand washing and self-quarantine**. It shows a high number of cases **overloading** our **healthcare system**, which can lead to **high loss of life**. This curve is **steep and sharp**. It looks like a **looming mountain**.



The **second trajectory** on the CDC graph shows what will happen if we are **successful** in our **protective measures**. There will still be cases, but **not as many**, and hopefully our healthcare system will be able to **keep up with the demand**. The **goal** is to get to that second curve.

I am **no medical expert** but the **CDC** is **reporting a rapid increase** in cases. Whether the increase in cases ends up looking like **first curve**, the **second curve**, or somewhere **in-between** I do not know. Maybe you're thinking, "Jonathan, I didn't tune in today to hear **more bad news**. If I want that I'll turn on the news." Next week I'm going to preach on *Art and Beauty* to give us a **break** from all things Coronavirus. But this week I still think we need to **hear how Jesus calls us to live** in our **current cultural moment**.

Right now we are living in the **shadow of a pandemic** and it is **scary**. It's easy to live in **fear**. This week as I was working I started **feeling sick** and I put my hand up to my **forehead** and it **feels warm**. **Uh oh...** I must have the **Coronavirus!** So I take my temperature and it's actually **less** than the **normal body temperature**. I did that **twice** this week. We feel like we're in the shadow and maybe you do too.

Jesus can **sympathize with us**. He **understands** what we're **experiencing**. *Yet Jesus wants us to know there is grace and goodness in the shadow because he is with us*. I believe Jesus has **something for us** here. First I want to talk about the **shadow**. Second. I want to talk about the **goodness** and grace we find in the shadow. And third I want to talk about **Jesus walking with us** in the shadow. So first, what is...?

The shadow

Today I'm going back to our **series** in **Acts**. The book of Acts is the **history** of the **first church**. If you look in the New Testament, it comes after the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, then Acts). In the first third of the book we hear about two disciples, **Peter** and **John**, and how they told others about the **life, death, and resurrection** of Jesus. They have the power to **heal** people and **many** are putting their **faith** and **trust** in Jesus (5,000). Still, it's **not easy**. They get **arrested**, thrown in **prison**, **questioned**, and **released**. There is a **looming shadow**, a growing **threat** of **persecution** and **suffering**.

Acts 5:12-16 (NIV) The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

The apostles are those men who knew Jesus, Peter and John and others. They are **performing miracles** of **healing** and **casting out demons** and the **people are amazed**. You would think everyone would be **rushing to join them**, but they're not. **Why not?** Perhaps they are **afraid** of **Peter's power**, which he just displayed in the story of **Ananias** and **Sapphira** who **lied** to God and **died** because of it (a scary story!). We are going to come **back** to that story soon but I think there was another reason the people were **afraid** to join them.

As I was **studying** this week I wondered why it mentions "**Solomon's Colonnade**." The colonnade was like a long meeting hall supported by columns (pillars). According to the historian **Josephus**, "The colonnades were all double, the supporting pillars were 37-1/2 feet high, cut from single blocks of the whitest marble, and the ceiling was paneled with cedar."¹ It was clearly a beautiful and amazing place.

If you've ever been **downtown** to **Quincy Market** and seen the massive **granite pillars** outside of **Faneuil Hall** you can imagine Solomon's Colonnade. Actually, it was **Westford's Fletcher Granite Company** that made those Quincy Market columns. They "were hauled to a landing in Chelmsford by **22 yokes of oxen**, loaded onto a **barge** and sent into **Boston**."²

But **why mention** "Solomon's Colonnade"? It seems like such an **unimportant detail**. The **key** to understanding is **not what** Solomon's Colonnade is but **where it is**. A colonnade ran around the **perimeter** of the **temple courtyard**.³ Solomon's Colonnade was on the **east side** of the **temple** and was like a "**porch**" to the temple **compound**. A porch is where you **gather** and **talk** and **relax**; but it's not as important as the **actual house**. The Colonnade was nowhere near as important as the temple.

Since we're talking about Boston imagine for a moment the **Red Sox** are having an amazing year (the season didn't get **delayed**). They're **winning** game after game and packing out **Fenway Park**. **Ticket sales** are through the roof and it looks like they'll make it to the **World Series**. But in the **fall** a group of **friends** start a **co-ed baseball division** a **couple blocks away** at **Clemente Field**. The games really start to catch on. Everyone wants to watch these teams play. They show **amazing skill**, it's **free**, and so they **grow** and **grow**. Pretty soon people are going to Clemente Field instead of Fenway and the Red Sox **ticket sales** start to drop. There are more and more **empty seats** because everyone's over at Clemente Field having a great time. The **executives** at **Fenway** and the **Mayor** would take notice. Maybe they'd try to **shut it down**.⁴

This is what it's like for these early Christians. They're **performing miracles** and **telling others about Jesus** and **growing** but people are **afraid** to join them because they are meeting in the **shadow of the temple**. It says the people respected them but "No one else dared join them..." The temple is the **religious, political, economic, and social center** of **Jerusalem**. It is an absolute **powerhouse**. If you upset the temple system with its **priests** and **economic alliances** you're gonna **pay**. If the temple isn't happy, **nobody** is happy.

This passage, right here, **Acts 5:12-16**, is a **turning point** in the **book of Acts**. Right after this the people in power at the temple begin **persecuting** the **apostles** and they **seize** and **murder Stephen**. All that was coming their way and **still** the Christians **gathered**, risking the **wrath** of the temple. **Why? Because...**

There is goodness and grace in the shadow.

God is at work in our **risk**. God is at work when we're **worried** or **anxious**. God is at work in **this cultural moment**. We can't see what's coming in **COVID-19**. We can't see what's coming in the **stock market**. We can't see what's coming in our **relationships** with **family members** and **friends**. We can't see what's coming a **month from now** or even **tomorrow** or even an **hour from now**. With all that **uncertainty** life can feel quite **risky**. *But there is goodness and grace in the shadow.* Look what God does in their shadow.

Acts 5:14 (NIV) Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Here's what this **doesn't say**. It doesn't say that God made sure **nothing bad** was **going to happen** to the Christians. It doesn't say that they **wouldn't lose their money** or **financial security**. It doesn't say they wouldn't lose their **social standing** or **access** to the **temple**. It doesn't say they knew **they'd live** or **be okay**. It doesn't say that all of their **friends** and **family** will be **safe**. It doesn't say any of these things.

Here's what this **does say**. **It says** that even though **some people were afraid** some **saw the truth** and **came to Jesus**. It says that despite the **looming threat** of the **temple powers** people realized **Jesus is worth more** than **anything** this world **has to offer**. It says that people were **believing** and **becoming Christians despite the risk**. *It says there is goodness and grace in the shadow.*

Here's what this **doesn't say** about **our shadow**. We **don't know** what's **going to happen**. We don't know if we'll all **be okay** or if those we love will **make it through**. We don't know and that creates feelings of **deep uncertainty** and with uncertainty comes **fear** and **anxiety**.

Here's what this **does say** about our shadow. We can **count on Jesus no matter what**. If you **believe in the Lord**, which means if you believe **Jesus is God**, and place your **whole trust in him**, your **whole life in his hands**, you'll **be okay**. You'll be okay **not** as the **world defines it** but **as God defines it** (John 16:33). God promises to **never leave us** or **forsake us** (Heb 13:5). God promises to **use all things**, even this, **for our good** (Rom 8:28). God promises that one day he'll **wipe away every tear** and **death will be no more** (Rev 21:1-4). *There is goodness and grace in our shadow.*

The people saw their belief in Jesus and **despite the risk** some still come.

Acts 5:15-16 (NIV) As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

When some dared to experienced God's goodness and grace in the shadow, **it drew others out**. It was a **ripple in a pond**. Their **faith in Christ brought** others to faith in Christ. When others saw **God's power** they **stopped being afraid**. They heard how these Christians were performing miracles and they dared to bring out their sick so that "at least **Peter's shadow** might fall on them..." There was a lot of **superstition** around shadows back then. A shadow falling on you could **benefit you** or **harm you** depending on whose shadow it was.⁵ **Peter pan's fun-loving mischievous shadow** wasn't a thing.

This wasn't the **correct way** to get healed; but **still God healed** them. "...all of them were healed..." This tells us **we don't have to have everything figured out**. We **don't have** to have **perfect faith**. We don't need to **be perfect**. We need to **believe Jesus is our Lord and Savior** and he'll **take care of the rest**. Do you think the people who were **sick** and **tormented by evil spirits** had it all figured out? No! They were probably

really **confused** and **delusional** and maybe even **spiritually hostile to Jesus**, but **still Jesus healed them**. God takes **broken people** and **mends** them up. *There is goodness and grace in the shadow.*

That goodness and grace **can look like actual physical healing**, if we **ask it** and the **Lord wills it**. That goodness and grace can look like **demons fleeing—true spiritual healing**. God's goodness and grace will look **different** in each of our **situations** but it will also look the **same** because it will look like **Jesus**.

Jesus is in the shadow with us.

There's this other time **Jesus** was in Jerusalem for a **festival** and he was actually walking through **Solomon's Colonnade** (John 10:22-23). The people were asking him if he is the **Messiah**, which mean's **God's special chosen king** (John 10:24). Instead of answering their question he talks about **those who believe in him**.

John 10:28-29 (NIV) 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

If you know **Jesus** as your **Lord** and **Savior** nothing can **snatch** you out of his **hands**. Jesus is in the shadow with us, holding us in his hands. He and his Heavenly Father hold us and we are **secure**. **How can we know** we are secure? How can we know we're **going to make it through**, not necessarily in this life but to **eternal life with Jesus** and our **Heavenly Father**?

Because. We have a **big brother** who **walked through the shadow before us**. The shadow he experienced is much **darker** and **deadlier than COVID-19**.

Luke 23:44-46 (NIV) 44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

At the cross Jesus experienced not just the shadow of **God's judgment on sin** but God's judgment itself. Jesus **didn't deserve** God's judgment. He never did anything wrong and always obeyed God. But he **willingly** took the judgment upon himself.

There is a much more **serious threat** than COVID-19—**eternity without God**. If we put our faith and trust in Jesus, God spares us. We **still suffer in this life** and one day we'll **die** but that's like the shadow of a **far greater consequence** we never have to taste if we know Jesus. We experience the **shadow of God's judgment** because **Jesus experienced the reality**. I read this and think it fits perfectly:

In *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller tells the story of a famous preacher at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in the first half of the twentieth century. His name was Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse, and his wife died when their daughter was still young. He wanted to come up with a good illustration to explain to his young daughter what had happened to his wife, her mother. One day as he was in the car with his daughter, a huge truck passed by them, and the shadow of the truck swept over the car. Dr. Barnhouse asked the little girl, "If you were to get hit by the truck, would you prefer that you get hit by the truck itself, or get hit by the shadow of the truck?"

She answered, "Oh daddy! The shadow of the truck rather than the truck itself because it won't hurt as much."

He responded along these lines: "That's exactly what happened to your mother. The shadow of the truck of the judgment of death came over your mother, but she is still alive. She's actually more alive

than we are. She's in the presence of God, and we will see her someday. You need to understand that only the shadow of the judgment of death went over her, but the truck of the judgment of death crushed Jesus. The crushing judgment of the truck ran over Jesus so only the shadow will go over us, your mother, and all who place their faith in him" (*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, page 317). - Quoted from *Micah For You: Acting Justly, Loving Mercy* by Stephen Um⁶

Jesus experienced the **reality** so **we** experience the **shadow**. Jesus experienced **death** on the **cross** so that even if we **taste pain** and **suffering** in **this life** one day we will experience **eternal life with him**. *There is goodness and grace in the shadow because Jesus is in the shadow with us.*

"Let's pray."

"Please rise for our benediction."

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

24 The Lord bless you and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

"Message me on Facebook if you want to talk or email me at jonathan@cornerstonewestford.com."

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message on Facebook Live during the 2020 COVID-19 (Coronavirus) lockdown in Massachusetts. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

You and your family or friends can use these group discussion questions to talk through today's sermon and Bible passage. Please use whatever questions you find helpful.

1. How are you feeling about everything going on with COVID-19 (coronavirus)? Are you feeling fine or anxious or somewhere in-between? How's your heart?
2. What type of shadow did the first believers face as they met in Solomon's Colonnade? Why is their meeting place significant?
3. What do you think of the idea that "There is goodness and grace in the shadow"? How do we see this in the early church's activity and how might we see it today?
4. God healed the people through Peter and even his shadow? Instead of turning away because of their superstition God heals them. Why do you think God does this? What does it teach us about him?
5. Do you think superstitious practices are okay today? Remember the principle that just because something is descriptive in Acts doesn't make it prescriptive.
6. Read John 10:27-29. Why can we as followers of Jesus know we are safe and secure in his hands? Do you feel safe and secure or not so much? Describe your confidence or lack thereof?
7. What does it mean for Jesus to bear God's judgment? What does it mean for him to bear the reality and us to only taste the shadow?

8. How does the idea that Jesus walks through the shadow with us make you feel? How does it make you think differently about what we are going through as a culture and what you might be going through personally?

End your discussion by praying for what you learned and that the Holy Spirit would help you apply it to your life. Pray that Jesus would use it to further his kingdom and bring our neighbors, friends, and family to him.

¹ Arnold, Clinton E. *Acts* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 27). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition. Some spelling corrected: “panelled” to “paneled.”

² Jay Adams, "H.E. Fletcher Granite Company LLC, Since 1881, Tradition Etched in Stone," ConstructionEquipmentGuide.com, May 24, 2010, accessed March 26, 2022, <https://www.constructionequipmentguide.com/he-fletcher-granite-company-llc-since-1881-tradition-etched-in-stone/14466>.

³ Arnold, Clinton E. p. 26.

⁴ N.T. Wright shares an illustration like this in his Acts commentary.

⁵ “This could be harmful as well as beneficial depending on who or what cast the shadow.” Arnold, Clinton E.. *Acts* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 38). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Um, Stephen. *Micah For You: Acting Justly, Loving Mercy* (God's Word For You) . The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.