

11. The Apostles Heal Many and Are Persecuted: Acts 5:12-42

Luke's narrative picks up with the apostles in Solomon's Colonnade once again, following their performing many miracles and wonders. Remember that this is the place where they were seized before and brought before the chief priests and the rulers. At that time, they were charged in Acts 4:18-20:

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

They are now back in the colonnade and doing exactly what they said they would do: they are speaking the word of the Lord and continuing to perform miracles that confirm the word as the word of the Lord. Therefore, the events of this lesson continue the controversy and struggle between the apostles and the Sanhedrin. The lesson opens with the apostles healing many people and speaking the word of the Lord.

The Apostles Heal Many

Acts 5:12-16

12 The apostles performed many miraculous 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. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. 15 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 evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

As they came together with all the believers in Solomon Colonnade, other people were afraid to join them, even though the Christians were highly regarded by the people. The situation is not unlike the one that occurred between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in John 12:42-43:

42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

The fear that ran among some of the people did not impede the Gospel, for more and more men and women were added to the church, having believed in the Lord. Today, one can only imagine the scene where people were laying their sick in the streets on beds, hoping that even the shadow of Peter might fall upon them. Others came from around the countryside and from the small towns bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits. That all these were healed must have created a sense of urgency among the Jewish leaders.

The Apostles Are Arrested

Acts 5:17-20

17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

Acts 5:17 shows how the controversy between the apostles and the Sadducees had escalated. Remember that the Sadducees were a sect that did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The apostles' teaching centered on Jesus Christ, whom God had raised from the dead, creating a direct clash of principle between the apostles and the Sadducees. Now the Sadducees are moved by emotion -- jealousy, and so they had the apostles put in the public jail, where an angel opened the doors and delivered them. The angel told them, "Go stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life."

Acts 5:21-26

21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin – the full assembly of the elders of Israel – and sent to the jail for the apostles. 22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." 24 On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

25 Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." 26 At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

The next day, the apostles appeared in the Temple courts, doing exactly what they were told, teaching the gospel. In the meantime, the high priest and his associates called together the Sanhedrin -- a group composed of all the elders of Israel. One can only imagine the suspense, followed by wonder, when it was reported that there was no one inside the jail, even though the guards were standing at the doors. The captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this, when someone came in and reported that the apostles were standing in the temple teaching. Once again, the captain and his officers seized the apostles. Verse 26 tells of another emotion that characterizes the situation - fear of the people. Differences in doctrine, jealousy, fear -- all of these compounded the situation and set the dramatic stage for the apostles to appear before the Sanhedrin.

The Apostles Appear before the Sanhedrin

Acts 5:27-32

27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

The Sanhedrin goes immediately to what they had ordered before: they had given strict orders not to teach in this name. They were also concerned that the apostles had filled Jerusalem with the teaching of Christ and had convicted Jewish leaders for crucifying the Lord. To all of this the apostles replied as they had before, "We must obey God rather than men." As in all of our previous examples, the apostles preached the gospel: Christ died, he

was buried, and he was raised from the dead. The apostles made clear that Jesus is prince in his kingdom and the Savior of the world. The apostles and the Holy Spirit were witnesses of these things, establishing the truth of their teaching. All those who obey God receive the Holy Spirit, as promised in Acts 2:38. Modern teaching that assumes that Christ was not raised as King and Lord of his kingdom, but defers it to sometime in the future, flatly contradicts this passage. For, Christ is exalted at the right hand of God, and Christ is Prince and Savior empowered to accept repentance from and to forgive the sins of Israel. The Israel of the Old Covenant ended with this exaltation of Christ.

Acts 5:33-39

33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. 35 Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. 36 Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. 37 After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. 38 Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

Leaders of the Jews were furious when they heard this, and they wanted to put the apostles to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law honored by the people persuaded them differently. Later we will learn that Gamaliel was the teacher of Saul, later called Paul who when he himself gave a defense said in Acts 22:2-3:

Then Paul said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.

After summarizing some examples of insurrection, Gamaliel said that they should leave these men alone and let them go. He pointed out forcefully that if the apostles are from God the Jewish leaders would only be fighting against God.

Acts 5:40

40 His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Although Gamaliel persuaded them to let the apostles go, before doing so, they flogged them. Flogging was a beating with a whip or a rod. Once again, the Sanhedrin ordered the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus.

The Apostles Never Stopped Teaching that Jesus Is the Christ

Acts 5:41-42

41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.

Suffering disgrace for the Name elevates Christians to their highest level of service in this life. Peter's firsthand experience here must have illuminated for him that statement on suffering revealed to him by the Holy Spirit and recorded in 1 Peter 4:13-16:

13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Paul also recognizes the need to suffer together with Christ if we are to share in his glory, in Rom 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

In any case, their sufferings and our sufferings do not compare to the inheritance promised to us as faithful Christians, as Paul expressed in Rom 8:18: “18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Acts 5:42

42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

The beatings and the threats did not deter the apostles from teaching and preaching the gospel whenever and wherever they found themselves. As Luke’s narrative unfolds, the apostles are firm in preaching the word of the Lord.