

The last few weeks we have read about how the chief priests had warned the apostles not to preach anymore about Jesus Christ. Despite this, the apostles kept on preaching, and doing miraculous signs, and thousands of Christians were meeting in the temple, in Solomon's Porch, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching about Jesus Christ.

The chief priests, the Sadducees, were not going to put up with that for long. Today we read about the move they made to put down the church, and how the Lord Jesus Christ preserved His church, even enabling them to declare to the sanhedrin "We ought to obey God rather than men" and then preach the law and gospel of Jesus Christ right to the very men who were commanding them to stop.

I. When the Lord Jesus Christ grants His church success, the powers of the world oppose it (17)

A. the high priest and his faction derived their wealth and power from their control of the temple complex; they were seeing that wealth and power threatened by the popularity of the Gospel message; they became very hot over this

1. Greek *ze/los*, from which we get the words "zeal," "zealous," and "zealot" lit. "heat"; when used in a favorable sense, "zeal"; when used in an unfavorable sense, "jealously"
2. these priests were running a very corrupt religious system; they had perverted what God gave them to suit themselves and serve their own purposes
3. the gospel of Jesus Christ was drawing away large crowds of people
4. so the priests opposed the church in order to preserve their own status
5. this same thing played itself out in the pagan cities, where the spread of the gospel caused people to leave their idol worship; those who derived their wealth from the idol worship became jealous and angry at Paul and the other Christians
6. of course we face this: those who derive their wealth, prestige, power from some corruption of the Christian religion get jealous if any of their followers are drawn away by the true religion of Jesus Christ

B. also, the chief priests were being accused of doing wrong, of committing sin (28b)

1. recall how this went in this case
  - a. they had taken Jesus to be crucified by the Romans
  - b. when Pontius Pilate said he didn't want the blood of that innocent man on his hands
  - c. the chief priests had said, "Let His blood be upon us and upon our children!"
  - d. but when the apostles later accused them of the very sin they committed in their pride and hatred, they resented it; not that they denied doing it, but they denied that it was wrong, that it was sinful
  - e. they wanted the apostles to stop saying that what they had done was wrong
2. note how this always goes on, and is going on right in front of us today
  - a. the powers of the world do all kinds of evil deeds
    - i. they kill babies still inside their mother's wombs
    - ii. they divorce their husbands or their wives for any and every reason
    - iii. they pay bribes and take bribes
    - iv. they take the Lord's name in vain
    - v. they forget the sabbath day

- vi. they dishonor their parents
- b. they see that Christ's church does not do these things; and that bothers them to some degree, because our refusal to do what they do is a silent testimony against them
- c. but as long as we agree with their mantra, "You can do whatever seems right to you as an individual." they are okay with us
- d. but when they hear us saying that what they do is wrong, they flare up in anger and hatred; "How dare you judge us!"
  - i. we see this play out over and over
  - ii. whenever a church grows very large, like Lakewood in Houston or Saddleback out in California, the pastor is inevitably invited to appear on national TV
  - iii. there he is asked some variation on this question, "Do you believe that everyone exceptions Christians is going to hell?"
  - iv. if the pastor equivocates, allowing that some who do not believe in Christ in this life may yet be blessed by God in the next life, he can be the media's darling; he is okay
  - v. but if he affirms what the Lord teaches in the bible, that all who do not belief in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins will indeed suffer in hell, then he and that church become *persona non grata*; no more appearances on TV; no more favor with the media; all mention of him and the church will be ugly, derisive, accusatory
- e. when God grants success to His church, so that our message about the world's sinfulness and need of repentance and forgiveness gets a wide hearing, and gathers many followers, the powers of the world eventually resort to violence against Christ's church
- C. of course it would have been reasonable for them to deal with the situation by inquiring into the facts of the matter, trying to ascertain what was the truth; but as so many corrupt religious authorities before and after them, they instead sought to suppress the truth by resorting to violence by power of the government
- D. this is the pattern in the scriptures, and throughout church history
  - 1. see how OT prophets were treated by the kings of Israel and Judah
  - 2. see how John the Baptist was treated
  - 3. see how the Lord Jesus Himself was treated
  - 4. see here how the apostles were treated
  - 5. see in the rest of Acts how Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others were treated
  - 6. see how the faithful throughout church history have been treated by the powers of the world
- E. we have had it easy in this country, because the influence of Christianity has been very strong; but still this principle is at work; sometimes we feel it even here in America; times may come when we feel it much more strongly; the Lord Jesus who loves us has provided us these true stories, so we can be ready when they come

II. When the powers of the world oppose His church, the Lord Jesus Christ preserves it by various means

A. usually by natural means

1. the militia (26)

a. this has come up before in the scriptures

b. here we see it again

c. the whole people, especially the men of the age to bear arms, are the

militia; and this is a powerful safeguard against government tyranny; whenever the governing authorities and their armed officers are inclined to act tyrannically, they are restrained to some degree by fear that the people will not stand for it, but will do them harm; the people, acting together, can always stand up against their government, since they so greatly outnumber the government's armed officers; (George Washington understood this well; you might greatly benefit from reading his plan for organizing the country's militia, from 1790, which was passed into law by congress in 1792, but which was long ago abandoned, but with much of the other wisdom of that generation)

d. but that body of people in Jerusalem as a militia was not well regulated, not well organized, armed, trained, disciplined; so they had only a weak and sporadic ability to deter tyranny in their government

e. let us instead have a well-regulated militia, able to secure our freedom against the ever-present threat of government tyranny; let every government official inclined to do violence to his own people's liberties think, "Those people are so well armed and well organized that I had better leave them alone."

f. at the same time, let us pray for our government officials, that God will so deal with them, that Christ's church may be left in peace, to live quiet lives in all godliness

## 2. politics

a. the council plotted to kill the apostles (33)

b. but a respected member counseled them not to (34-39)

c. understand the politics going on here

i. the Pharisees, of whom Gamaliel was the most respected, were no friends of Jesus and his disciples

ii. but in this case, the Sadducees were the ones whose power was being threatened and weakened by the success of the church right in their temple courts

iii. so even though the Pharisees would also like to see the followers of Jesus silenced, they saw an opportunity to have the power of the Sadducees weakened a bit if the church was allowed to continue growing

d. so when you pray for the peace and tranquility of God's church in a time when the government is very corrupt, recall that God does not act for the benefit of His church only by establishing good government, but sometimes by using the very corruption within bad governments to keep them from doing the persecution of the church that they would like to do

## B. miracle: an angel releasing them from prison

1. when facing opposition, the church should remember always Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the apostles here, and all the other believers who have been preserved miraculously

2. pray that God will preserve His church, and even when there is no natural means that will help, God may help miraculously

3. yet, remember that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told the king that even if God did not miraculously save them, they still would not deny Him

## C. the word of God:

1. there is danger to the church in the temptation to fear and obey men instead of God

a. the council scolded the apostles for not obeying them when they ordered Peter and John not to preach in the name of Jesus anymore

b. but the scriptures teach in many places that God is to be feared and obeyed, and men who set themselves contrary to God are not to be obeyed, even if they are kings

c. so the apostles were able to declare boldly, "We ought to obey God

rather than men!" (29)

2. there is danger to the church also to recant or to become discouraged by real persecution, such as being beaten for the name of Jesus Christ

a. the sanhedrin this time did not release the apostles peacefully, but had them beaten

b. but the Lord Jesus Himself had told them to rejoice when persecuted

c. so, despite their beating, the apostles were able to leave the council rejoicing (41)

D. the power of His Holy Spirit (29-32)

1. the apostles were called to account before the Sanhedrin, and we know that in themselves, these men did not have the courage to keep up their confession of Christ even in front of a servant girl, let alone the nation's ruling council

2. but recall what Jesus Christ had told them:

Luke 12:11-12 "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. (12) For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

3. and indeed the Holy Spirit gave power to the apostles, so that they could proclaim the law and Gospel of Jesus Christ boldly (30-32)

III. When the Lord Jesus Christ preserves His church, we are to continue fulfilling His commission

A. The Lord released the apostles from prison with the command to resume preaching (19-20); and they indeed went right back to preaching

B. The Lord protected the apostles from abuse by the officers that they might be ready to proclaim Jesus to the council (26, 29); and they preached the law and the gospel right into the teeth of those who most opposed that message

C. The Lord restrained the council from killing the apostles that they could continue teaching and preaching Jesus Christ (42); and they went right on teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ

So, then, let us devote ourselves to the apostles' doctrines of Jesus Christ. When the powers of the world oppose, understand that nothing strange is happening. This is to be expected. And the Lord Jesus Christ will help us, by different means according to what we need, and what His plans are for us. Only let us obey God, rather than fearing what men can do to us. Let us keep proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in His name.

Scripture Reading: Numbers 22:35-23:12

Confession of Sin: Isaiah 6:1-8

Sermon: We Ought to Obey God Acts 5:17-42

Benediction: Deuteronomy 10:1-4 You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

Verse 26

Geneva:

Tyrants who do not fear God are forced to fear his servants.

Poole:

they feared men more than God, who had done so great things amongst them.

Clarke:

we may therefore conclude that the officers entreated them to accompany them to the council; and that they felt it their duty to obey every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, and so cheerfully went with them, trusting in the Lord their God.

Hodgins:

Gamaliel's argument was flawed; the first half is false

- I. The Sadducees Arrested the Apostles (17)
- II. The Lord Sent the Apostles Back to Preach (19-21a)
- III. The Council Arrested the Apostles Again (21b-27a)
- IV. The Apostles Preached the Gospel to the Council (27b-33)