

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #14

Acts 5:11-42

One of the many traits of the modern day church is the trait of discussing how we reach people. There are conferences on how to market the church. There are conferences on evangelism. There are conferences on revivals. There are conferences on finances. People love to get together to discuss. But what you don't see is too many churches getting the job done in taking a strong stand for God's Word. You don't see too many churches rocking the politically correct world and heralding truth straight from God's Word. Most of these conferences accomplish nothing major doctrinally or even spiritually speaking.

One commentator said that he had a friend who used to say that most Christians were so afraid to take a stand and get out on a limb, that they never bothered even climbing the tree. It wasn't that way in the early church. That early church was bold. It preached truth to a world that did not want to hear truth. The people of God had strong conviction and they took strong stands, even if it would get them into trouble. They preached things people didn't want to hear. They did not compromise and they had the power of God behind them.

According to the first sixteen verses of chapter 5, there were six powerful things happening:

- 1) Those who pretended to be something they weren't dropped dead (5:1-10).
- 2) There was a great fear and reverence for God and His Church (5:11), no fluffy atmosphere.
- 3) All apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders (5:12a), (4:30).
People would bring the sick to the apostles and there were so many that they laid them in the streets, and when the Apostle Peter walked by his shadow healed them (5:15). People were coming to see these apostles from all the cities surrounding Jerusalem. The sick were healed and so were the demon possessed (5:16). Notice **verse 16** says people with "unclean" spirits were being healed. People who are involved in impure and unclean things are in the world of demons, but deliverance is found in Jesus Christ. This was critical because God had just killed two people.
- 4) There was an amazing sense of unity among the Christians at the temple at Solomon's portico (5:12b). They did not have a church building so they were meeting outside the temple, and there was a powerful sense of unity.
- 5) People were afraid to even associate themselves with this church because it was so powerful, but all people held them in high esteem (5:13).
- 6) Many more were coming to faith in Jesus Christ, both men and women, and the numbers were increasing (5:14).

There was boldness in preaching the Word of God and there were amazing results that were taking place, and you can imagine that this was rubbing the religious leaders the wrong way. What we learn here is this:

WHEN INDIVIDUALS OR A CHURCH IS BEING POWERFULLY USED BY GOD TO COMMUNICATE TRUTH, PHONY RELIGIOUS LEADERS WILL BE JEALOUS AND WILL DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO TRY TO STOP IT, BUT THEY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO STOP IT.

Years ago Dr. S. Lewis Johnson made an interesting observation. He said that one of the great cries of the academic world is the need for academic freedom. He observed that there is no real academic freedom in the academic world. He said you can discuss any form of philosophy; you may discuss pragmatism, existentialism, skepticism, rationalism or mysticism, but you cannot discuss Biblical Christianity (*Acts* 5:17-42, p. 4). There is no real freedom in this area. Why is that? Because the truth of God is hated by most people in this world, especially by proud, arrogant religious educators, and that truth got these apostles in serious trouble. The real enemy of Biblical Christianity is arrogant religion. Now the Book of Acts is an action story and there are eleven actions to see here in this part of it:

ACTION #1 - The religious leaders are jealous of the power of the apostles and the church.
5:17

The religious leaders of Jerusalem had never seen anything like this. People were coming from all over to be part of this church. Thousands of people were responding. When that happened, the High Priest (probably Annas) stood up with his associates who were a sect of Sadducees, and they were “filled with jealousy.”

Think about this for a moment. These religious leaders are not interested in truth. They are not interested in protecting the Word of God. They are not interested in protecting God’s people. They are jealous. They are jealous of the fact that the apostles are right with God and are being mightily used by God. **Their idea is that these religious gatherings should be about us, not about these apostles and Jesus Christ.** R.C. Sproul said if you carefully study church history, you will discover that “those most hostile to the purity of the gospel have been clergy” (*Acts*, p. 119). Truth is, most today who attack the truth are not the secularists or the humanists, but unbelieving religious leaders who teach in seminaries and preach in churches.

ACTION #2 - The religious leaders forcefully arrest the apostles and put them in a public jail.
5:18

These leaders were so jealous they locked them up to shut them up. The real humor of this is that the reason they put them in the public prison is because this prison is more secure than just locking them up in some room. This will not be the last time that Peter and the apostles find themselves in jail. This court system was totally corrupt because it is putting those in jail who are doing good things for people, and who are telling them the truth. Of course if you put a true man of God in a public jail, he will just keep preaching and teaching.

ACTION #3 - God authorizes an angel to break them out of jail. **5:19**

This is so funny because the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection and they do not believe in angels (*Acts* 23:8). God loves to overthrow the folly of man. Now God will break His men out of jail by using angels two more times in the Book of Acts. He will do it again with Peter (*Acts* 12:6-11), and He will also do it with Paul and Silas (*Acts* 16:26ff).

Now one question worth considering is why did God break His apostles out sometimes but not all times? The answer to that question is this - God desires that His people realize that He can deliver His people from anything at any time, and if He doesn't deliver them, it is His will that they be where they are.

God has the power to deliver us from the clutches of anything at any time and if He is not delivering us, it is His will that we be right where we are at the present time. He may want us in a specific spot to make a specific statement for Him. We need to know that and we need to believe that. God can get us out of any jam if He wills, and if He is not getting us out of the jam it is His will to have us in it.

ACTION #4 - God's angel tells them to preach the life message in the temple. **5:20**

The apostles are not commanded to run or go on the lam, they are commanded to go straight out in the open and preach the message of life. **The message of life is believe in the name of Jesus Christ to be saved from your sins, and you may have eternal life.** Jesus is the "Bread of Life"; He is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life", and no one can get into a life relationship with God except through faith in Him. Any message other than this is a death message.

One reason why angels are not given the job to preach is that they don't know anything about personal redemption. How could an angel explain the overwhelming burden and guilt of sin? How could an angel explain the freedom one experiences when one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ? How could an angel expound on the salvific truths of the cross when he has never experienced them? It is our job to take this life message to the world.

ACTION #5 - The apostles entered the temple and start teaching . **5:21a**

Now carefully observe the first service where these apostles are preaching and teaching occurs at "daybreak" (**5:21**). Just imagine a time when people were so interested in hearing God's Word that they would go to a service at 5:30-6:00 a.m., just to hear it taught. Some people can't seem to even get to the second service on time at 11a.m. **One thing that has never changed in the Church Age and will never change is that God does His powerful work through accurate preaching and teaching of God's Word, which is precisely why Paul would later say to Timothy, "I charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus...preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:1-2).** The job of the minister is to preach and teach God's Word.

Well one might ask just exactly what where these apostles teaching at this point? They were really unraveling truth about Jesus Christ.

Verse 28 informs us they preached about the blood of Jesus Christ.

Verse 30 informs us they preached the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they preached that they were guilty of killing Jesus Christ.

Verse 31 informs us that they preached the need for repentance that if any would change their thinking and believe on Jesus Christ, they would find forgiveness of sins.

Verse 42 tells us they also taught that Jesus (the Savior) is the Messiah.

These apostles were not preaching their stories or testimonies, they were not reminiscing about their experiences; they were not preaching a message of self esteem or prosperity gospel, they were unraveling deep truth about Jesus Christ. Here is one reason why the Church has lost its authority; it has stopped teaching and preaching the whole truth about Jesus Christ.

ACTION #6 - The religious leaders learn that the apostles had escaped from a completely secured jail, and were teaching in the temple. **5:21b-25**

The fact that the apostles were out of jail had been a “miraculous liberation” of God, and it baffled the leaders who had locked them up. Notice **verse 21** emphasizes “all” the religious leaders are gathered to discuss these things. This was like some emergency meeting of all the powerful religious leaders in the world.

ACTION #7 - The religious leaders get the apostles and bring them back for questioning . **5:26-32**

The leaders went and got the apostles without violence; not because they didn’t want to kill them but because they were afraid of what the people would do, and brought them into this kangaroo court meeting (**5:26**). When they got into the meeting, the “high priest” said we ordered you to stop preaching and teaching about the name of Jesus, but you have not only not listened, **you have “filled Jerusalem” with your teaching. In fact, you have been telling people we are guilty of this man’s blood (5:28)**. Notice they call Jesus a “man” (ανθρωπος), not God, not Savior, not Messiah.

In **verse 29** Peter speaks to these very powerful leaders. These apostles are standing in a court of law with their lives on the line. Peter looks them straight in the eyes and says we will not obey you, “we must obey God rather than men.” But Peter didn’t stop there; in **verse 30** Peter and the apostles said with their own lives on the line, **you are the ones who killed Jesus Christ** who is now exalted in heaven at the right hand of God. **And then in an amazing demonstration of grace in verse 31, Peter offers these same men forgiveness of sins if they will repent** . If they would change their minds about whom Jesus Christ is and believe on Him, they could have forgiveness of their horrible sins. Peter said in **verse 32** we are witnesses of these things, and everyone who believes on Jesus Christ receives the Holy Spirit.

I don’t know what your horrible sins are, but this is what I do know - if you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved and forgiven of all of them.

One other point here to observe: I don’t know if we obey God whether or not it will work in our favor, or whether it will work out against us. I have preached God’s Word and seen marvelous results and I have preached God’s Word where some have wanted to run us out of town. But we will be judged by this same principle one day before God. Proclaim God’s truth regardless of consequences, because we are to be His witnesses.

ACTION #8 - The religious leaders want to kill the apostles. **5:33**

The Greek words “cut to the quick” (διπρω) literally means their hearts and minds were sawed or cut in two (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 110). Horatio Hackett said when these leaders heard this they started “convulsing with rage.” (*Acts*, p. 81)

You would think these religious leaders would say this is unbelievable that God would offer us grace and forgiveness of our sins. But that is not what happened. Notice **verse 33**, these leaders were under terrible conviction to the point they wanted to kill these apostles. They wanted to do the same thing to these apostles that they had done to Jesus Christ.

ACTION #9 - One religious leader warns the other leaders not to kill them. **5:34-39**

Gamaliel was the grandson of a famous Jewish Rabbi whose name was Hillel. He was a key religious leader who was Paul’s teacher. In fact, later in this very Book of Acts the Apostle Paul will refer to him (Acts 22:3). According to historical accounts in the Talmud, he was a zealous Pharisee whose knowledge level was unmatched and he was known to be a very distinguished teacher. It is said that after this episode here in Acts, Gamaliel lived another 15 years (*Hackett*, p. 82). It is interesting that in the Mishnah it is said that when Gamaliel died, reverence for the law died out. He was a powerful Jewish leader.

He mentions two historical episodes in order to persuade the other leaders not to kill these apostles. The first episode was with a man named “Theudas” (**5:36**). He led some insurrectionist movement over a group of about 400 men and he was killed, and the men who followed him came to nothing. The second episode was with a man named “Judas of Galilee” (**5:37**) who also formed some insurrectionist movement about paying taxes, and he was killed and those who followed him came to nothing as well.

Now Gamaliel appears to give some sound advice here, but in all reality it is not sound advice. The only thing he says that is true here is “if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them” (**v. 39**).

He is a fence straddler. What he should have said is we need to believe on Jesus Christ right now. Instead, he said leave this matter alone because if it turns out we move the wrong way here, we could end up losing our power or we could end up dead.

Actually, this part of his advice isn’t true. False religion flourishes and does not die. Look at the devilish religion of Islam, or Mormonism, or Jehovah’s Witness or Christian Science. They have not disappeared from the scene; they are blossoming today.

ACTION #10 - The religious leaders beat them, warn them and release them. **5:40**

The apostles were whipped, and they received the same kind of lacerations that the Lord Jesus received. They beat them up and then let them go.

ACTION #11 - The apostles rejoice and continue to preach and teach every day. **5:41-42**

The apostles left rejoicing because God had considered them worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. I do not ever want to minimize any person's response to suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. It is a sacred honor to suffer for His name. Frankly, I don't know how I would respond to this myself. But I can tell you this. With these apostles, they did not whine or complain, they rejoiced.

I don't know what your present situation is, but if you are a believer you are not called to be sinlessly perfect, you are called to be joyful. We are to rejoice always. If the apostles can rejoice after being beat up for preaching, then we should be able to rejoice also.

Notice "every day" in the temple and from house to house they kept on teaching and preaching that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior.

Our responsibility is to obey God and proclaim His truth no matter what. It may mean mockery, jail, beating, or death.