

Brookland Baptist Church
Bible Study
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Lecture XV

May 25, 2022

The Book of Acts
Acts 5:11 - 31

Acts 5:11

11 “Great fear gripped the entire church and all others who heard what had happened.”

This is the first appearance of the term “church” ekklesia, meaning “assembly in the book of Acts—and notice it is a moment of judgment! It will become the regular word for the universal Church and the local Church in the remainder of the book. God’s judgment on Ananias and Sapphira produced great fear among the believers, making them realize how seriously God regards sin in the Church.

Acts 5:12 – 13 –

12 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.

Many signs and wonders were done: In Acts 4:30, we read that these early Christians prayed that God would continue to do signs and wonders through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus. This shows that this prayer was answered, and these remarkable signs and wonders continued. We aren’t told what these signs and wonders were. Presumably, they were like what we see in other places in Acts and in the Gospels – healings, deliverance from demonic powers, unusual blessings. **They were all with one accord:** Often, the fact that God’s people are together all with one accord is a greater display of the power of the Holy Spirit than any particular sign or wonder. Our selfish hearts and stubborn minds can be harder to move than any mountain. **Through the hands of the apostles:** Seemingly, God chose to do these miraculous works through the hands of the apostles and not mainly through others. Yet God wisely chooses which hands will bring a miracle. He had a purpose in doing it through the hands of the apostles.

The community of Christians had a marvelous reputation for integrity, and everybody knew it was a serious thing to be a follower of Jesus. An Ananias and Sapphira incident would reduce the level of casual commitment.

Acts 5:14

14 “Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women.”

Luke explained that despite many unbelieving Jews hanging back, more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women. More of the responsive Jews than ever were coming to Christ.

Acts 5:15-16 –

15 “As a result of the apostles’ work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter’s shadow might fall across some of them as he went by.”

16 “Crowds came in from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.”

The word was beginning to spread beyond Jerusalem, drawing people from the villages around Jerusalem. In the same way that healing had “flowed” from Christ during his ministry on earth (Mark 5:25–34), here it was Peter — one of Jesus’ “witnesses” — whose shadow simply had to fall across the sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they would be healed. These miraculous signs confirmed the validity of the apostles’ witness and connected their work to Christ’s healing ministry. What did these miraculous healings do for the early Church? They attracted new believers, confirmed the truth of the apostles’ teaching, and demonstrated that the power of the Messiah, who had been crucified and had risen, was now with His followers.

Arrest and Trial Once Again

Smarting from the apostles’ refusal to heed their threats, and in light of the growing popularity of the Christian movement, the Jewish authorities clamped down. They arrested and jailed Peter and his colleagues. Therefore, the second arrest of the apostles was inevitable. The Sanhedrin had strictly ordered them to abstain from teaching in the name of Jesus and they had publicly disregarded that injunction. That to the Sanhedrin was a doubly serious matter. These apostles were not only heretics, they were also potential disturbers of the peace. Palestine was always an inflammable country; if this were not checked it might well result in some kind of popular rising; and that was the last thing the priests and Sadducees wanted because then Rome would intervene.

Acts 5:17-18 –

17 “Then the high priest and his friends, who were Sadducees, reacted with violent jealousy” 18 “They arrested the apostles and put them in the jail.”

They arrested the apostles and put them in jail. The religious leaders did not listen and learn the gospel message that focused on their own Messiah; instead, they reacted to the apostles with violent jealousy. The word “jealousy” translates to the word *zelos*, which can also mean “zeal.”

The zeal of the religious leaders was to wipe out this new movement. Peter and the apostles were already commanding more respect than the religious leaders had ever received. In addition, the apostles could do the most amazing miracles, a power the high priest and his fellow Sadducees lacked.

Acts 5:19-20

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.”

The jealous religious leaders thought they could silence the apostles by throwing them into jail. But God would not allow his servants to be silenced. In a startling moment, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out! The phrase “angel of the Lord” (angelos kuriou) denotes divine intervention. The angel of the Lord refers to God’s presence (Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13); (Luke 1:11; 2:9.)

Acts 5:21

21 “So the apostles entered the Temple about daybreak and immediately began teaching”

So, the apostles entered the Temple. Without a moment’s hesitation, the apostles did just exactly as commanded by the angel of the Lord. They obeyed immediately, boldly, and courageously. The temple at daybreak was a busy place. Many people stopped there to pray and worship at sunrise. The apostles were already there, ready to tell them the good news of new life in Jesus Christ.

Their boldness serves as a model for us. We should courageously proclaim the message of Christ as the Spirit creates opportunities for us.

Acts 5:22-23

22 “But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported” 23 “The jail was locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!”

The prisoners were being called for trial, so the Temple guards went to the jail to get them. These “temple guards” were stationed around the temple to ensure order in that very busy place. They were Jewish priests from the tribe of Levi, stern defenders of orthodoxy and temple order, who worked for the high priest. However, they returned rather dumbfounded, reporting that the door of the cell was locked, the guards were faithfully standing outside at their posts, but when they opened the cell door, no one was there! So complete was the miracle that no one could deny that God’s power was behind it.

Acts 5:24

24 “Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were perplexed about them, wondering what might be going on.”

The captain of the temple and the chief priests were perplexed (dieporoun, literally, “were at a loss to explain”) about how these men had escaped from a locked cell. Professional guards do not lose twelve prisoners! The “captain” was a high-ranking official belonging to the priestly aristocracy that is the Sadducees, second in authority only to the high priest.

5:25–26

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 high council is convened and waiting while the temple guards are searching for prisoners who are no longer in custody. In the middle of their deliberations, they receive a report that the escaped prisoners are right back where they were first arrested, doing the very thing for which they had been arrested! The officers did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. The expanding reputation of the church and various “power” events associated with it—miraculous healings, the death of some members for lying to the church, this miraculous jailbreak—would certainly make the leaders careful. Jealousy over the apostles’ popularity with the people had been one of the main motivating factors for their arrest in the first place

5:27–28

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.”

The temple was close to the complex where the high priest lived. The apostles went peaceably with the temple guard to appear before the Sanhedrin (the high Council) to be questioned by the high priest. In Caiaphas’s remarks, note that he would not even mention the name of the one in whose authority the apostles were teaching; instead, he strictly ordered the apostles not to teach in this name, because the leaders did not want to be considered guilty of this man’s blood even though they were.

5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.”

The New Testament makes it clear that believers are to obey governmental authority Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17, but not when the authority requires believers to sin. It would have been sinful for these apostles to obey the leaders' mandate not to speak when they had been clearly commanded by God himself to speak (5:20). God is the highest authority and rules in the highest court anywhere. Our first obedience is always to him. In that case, they had to obey God rather than any human authority.

5:30 “The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by crucifying him.

When Peter, the Galilean fisherman-turned-preacher, spoke to this group of religious leaders, he identified their common heritage with the phrase the God of our ancestors. These words tied the miracles these leaders had been hearing about to the Old Testament miracles, with which they were thoroughly familiar. The God who had parted the Red Sea and had led the Israelites to the Promised Land had also raised Jesus from the dead. These words would have baffled the Sadducee party in the Sanhedrin, for Sadducees did not believe in any type of resurrection.

5:31 “God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.”

Let's unpack these parts:

- Not only had God raised Jesus, he also had exalted him to his own right hand. “Right hand” signified the place of highest honor and authority. In ancient royal courts, the right side of the king's throne was reserved for the person who could act in the king's place. God “exalted” Christ to this position for Christ, who had been killed by humans, has been raised to the highest position of power with God.
- The term “Prince” (archegon) means “originator, leader, pioneer,” one who leads the way. Instead of demanding his rights as the prince, however, Christ lowered himself to become the Savior: “Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form.
- And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6–8 NLT). Through that death, Christ “made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood on the cross” (Colossians 1:20 NLT). Jesus is the “Savior” because through his death he can offer repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. With these words, Peter was offering salvation to the very people who had crucified the Savior. They, along with all the rest of Israel, could find forgiveness through the crucified and risen Christ. Peter mentioned only Israel here, for it was not until later as we will see in chapter 10 that Peter would understand that Gentiles were to be included in this offer of repentance and forgiveness.