

SIN, SURGE, SUFFERING,
REJOICING
ACTS 5



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Sin, Surge, Suffering, Rejoicing: Acts 5
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Introduction to Acts 5

The ongoing work of Christ continues as we see the first Christians beginning to *sign* the Kingdom in their community. By their commitment to holiness, service, and proclamation, they make it clear a new reality has broken into human history.

And by their suffering and perseverance, they demonstrate just how powerful that new reality – the Holy Spirit – is to enable people to fulfill their calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12).

This chapter recalls the sin of Achan in the book of Joshua and the drastic steps that were necessary to keep the people of God from failing in their mission. It also shows the power of the Gospel to heal, restore, and reconcile people with God, and to demonstrate before the watching – and sometimes resisting – world that the vision of Daniel (2.44, 45) and Isaiah (9.6, 7) was being fulfilled right before their eyes.

And before the hapless, helpless eyes of the devil as well.

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Sin in the Camp

Pray Psalm 51.1-3.

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin *is* always before me.

Sing Psalm 51.1-3.

(Passion Chorale: [*O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*](#))

Be gracious to me, Savior, according to Your love!
According to Your mercy, my sins, my sins remove!
O wash me, precious Savior, and cleanse me from all sin;
look on me with Your favor, and cause my grief to end.

Read and meditate on Acts 5.1-6.

Preparation

1. What wrong did these people do?
2. How did Peter interpret their actions?

Meditation

We recall that immediately after Israel's great victory at Jericho, sin in the camp almost derailed the whole endeavor (Josh. 7). Satan, though bound by our Lord Jesus (Matt. 12.22-29), still stalks and rages about, always looking for ways to short-circuit the ongoing work of the Lord (v. 3; cf. 1 Pet. 5.8). The believer's duty – and the duty of the church – is to resist him (1 Pet. 5.9).

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they kept part of the proceeds of the sale of their property. As Peter noted, it was theirs to do with as they wished. But by representing the portion of the proceeds they donated as the *whole* of what they had received, they lied to the church and the Lord, and stole God's glory to make themselves look good (v. 4).

Peter's role in this situation was to expose the sin. By the Spirit, he had come to know that this couple's actions were not on the up-and-up. Ananias died (v. 5), perhaps because of the shock of being found out and embarrassed in front of the very people he'd been trying to impress. More likely, God brought this judgment on him as a way of saying to His Church, right here at the get-go, that you must not harbor sin in your midst (Ps. 66.18). You will have no more success than Israel did against Ai if you allow sin to find among you a place to root and flourish. The fear of God's discipline resonated with the hearts of His people, just as it should (v. 5).

God intends the church – His assembly, body, and temple, and the sign of His Kingdom – to be a holy community. The actions of cleansing and renewal taken in Acts 5 are strong, but they were necessary at this critical stage of the church's life, and we can see the benefit that came from this discipline as we read through the rest of Acts 5.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It is not as if God has not warned His people, then and now, how He feels about false giving and lying. And if somehow, we were still wondering, Ananias and Sapphira thoroughly confirm His thoughts!

Hear the word of the LORD about false giving:

“Dishonest scales *are* an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight *is* His delight.”

“The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination; how much more *when* he brings it with wicked intent!”

“Whoever falsely boasts of giving *is like* clouds and wind without rain.” (Prov. 11.1; 21.27; 25.14)

Hear the word of the LORD about lying:

“You shall not bear false witness...” (Ex. 20.16).

“The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth” (Ps. 34.16).

“I hate and abhor lying, *but* I love Your law” (Ps. 119.163).

“A righteous *man* hates lying, but a wicked *man* is loathsome and comes to shame” (Prov. 13.5).

“Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and *then* come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations?’” (Jer. 7.8-10).

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man...” (Col. 3.9, 10).

We are all without excuse. We know the truth. And knowing the truth,
we must strive always to keep sin out of our camp! So, hear the word of the LORD:
“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4.23).

For reflection

1. What was so bad about the sin of these two people?
2. What do you suppose would have happened in the new Kingdom community if nothing had happened to them?
3. What kind of giving honors God?

*The falsehood was an attempt to deceive the Spirit of truth, who so manifestly spoke and acted by the apostles. The crime of Ananias was not his retaining part of the price of the land; he might have kept it all, had he pleased; but his endeavoring to impose upon the apostles with an awful lie, from a desire to make a vain show, joined with covetousness. But if we think to put a cheat upon God, we shall put a fatal cheat upon our own souls. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 5.1-11**

Pray Psalm 51.4-13.

Let the Lord search your soul and life (Ps. 139.23, 24). Confess and repent of any sin He brings to mind. Make sure throughout the day that you practice confession and repentance as the Lord leads.

Pray Psalm 51.4-13.

(Passion Chorale: [*O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*](#))

Against You only, Savior, have I become unclean;
thus, just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.
Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within;
to wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

In Jesus’ blood and mercy, Lord, cleanse my evil heart!
Let me washed, cleansed, renewed be and pure in whole and part.

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Bring joy again and gladness; look not upon my sin.
Deliver me from sadness; renew me yet again!

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.
Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;
thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

2 What's Good for the Gander

Pray Psalm 52.1-4.

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God endures continually.
Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness.
Selab
You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.

Sing Psalm 52.1-4.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

Read Acts 5.1-11; meditate on verses 7-11.

Preparation

1. Why was Sapphira as guilty as her husband?
2. What happened to her?

Meditation

Ananias' wife, Sapphira, is given an opportunity to come clean and set matters straight (v. 8). Instead, she holds to the line the lying couple had agreed on, thus sharing in the sin of her husband.

Ananias and Sapphira had "agreed together" (v. 9) in this action, and in so doing they "tested" the Holy Spirit of God. We tend to think of the Spirit as the "Comforter." But Peter makes it clear they weren't testing His comforting skills, like people do today who excuse their sin by saying, "Yes, I know it's wrong, but God loves me just as I am, and He understands and will forgive."

Don't be so sure.

What these people "tested" in the Spirit was the muscle of His holiness. He is the *Holy* Spirit, and He will defend His holiness, even if it entails severe and unpleasant discipline against the very people in whom He dwells (Heb. 12.3-11).

By now Peter knows the drill: What's good for the gander is good for the goose. Again, Peter did not strike this woman down; he knew that God is consistent in His response to sin, and, as it turned out, he was right (v. 10).

The ongoing work of Christ is to replace the kingdom of darkness and the lie (Rom. 1.18-32) with the Kingdom of light, truth, and life, and to restore men and women to a proper relationship with God and one another. Churches are central as signs of the Kingdom and agents for healing, restoration, and reconciliation.

In this ongoing work, discipline is sometimes necessary, and sometimes that discipline can be severe. See how this severe case effected for good the rest of the believing community (v. 11).

It is much sweeter to love the Lord Jesus than the fleeting and deadly desires of the flesh.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

There is a hierarchy to life that is important to follow. Not everybody can be in charge.

In the home it is the same. God over all, then a husband is responsible for his wife and children. The confusion ensues when positions are reneged upon, or any number of God's laws are broken, and then nobody decides to stand for what is right. And the family becomes one more catastrophic casualty of the war against the enemy (Eph. 6.12).

In this scenario, Sapphira is not cut some slack because she "can't" or "shouldn't" speak against her husband. No, she was given an opportunity to not adhere to the "party line". Therefore, she is as culpable as her husband for lying.

She would have found success by telling the truth. She was given the opportunity to do so, because she is equally as responsible before God for her own behavior.

In the same way, none of us will be able to stand before God at the judgment and blame someone else's bad behavior for our own bad response. The hierarchy ends at the judgment seat of Christ. No excuses will be received.

"Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15.22).

"To do righteousness and justice *is* more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice" (Prov. 21.3).

Any time we might be tempted to *not* do what is right, when we *know* it is right, because we think it is *someone else's* responsibility to do it; or it is convenient to *blame someone else* for the transgression, but we don't step in to do *justice*, we are as *guilty* as they. And lying is never okay, regardless of whom we have agreed with, even our spouse.

When in doubt, reread this story, for a good barometer on acceptable behavior.

For reflection

1. How can you know when you are being tempted *not* to be truthful? What should you do then?
2. What are the risks of standing for truth, when all around people are ignoring or excusing themselves from doing so?
3. Can the ongoing work of Christ go forward apart from the truth of God? Explain.

[T]his punishment was in reality mercy to vast numbers. It would cause strict self-examination, prayer, and dread of hypocrisy, covetousness, and vain-glory, and it should still do so. It would prevent the increase of false professors. Let us learn hence how hateful falsehood is to the God of truth, and not only shun a direct lie, but all advantages from the use of doubtful expressions, and double meaning in our speech. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 5.1-11

Pray Psalm 52.5-9.

Pray that God's truth will prevail over the lies that characterize so much of life in our day. Pray that He will use you, as you wait on Him, as an instrument of His truth.

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Sing Psalm 52.5-9.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, “Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.

“But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!”

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

3 In Your Face, Satan

Pray Psalm 54.6, 7.

I will freely sacrifice to You;
I will praise Your name, O LORD, for *it is* good.
For He has delivered me out of all trouble;
And my eye has seen *its desire* upon my enemies.

Sing Psalm 54.6, 7

(Beatitudo: *Father of Mercies, in Your Word*)

Willingly will we praise You, Lord, gladly adore Your Name!
You have redeemed us by Your Word and blest us by the same.

From all our trouble, by Your grace, You have redeemed us, Lord.
While all our foes in sad disgrace reel backward from Your Word.

Read Acts 5.1-16; meditate on verses 12-16.

Preparation

1. How did the situation of verses 1-11 affect the church in Jerusalem?
2. How did the local people regard the church in their midst?

Meditation

This chapter began with Satan trying to throttle the ongoing work of Christ (Acts 1.3). Now we find the apostles, in a very public manner, doing those things which signal the presence of the Kingdom and contribute to its advance (vv. 13-16). One more demonic scheme, blowing up in the arch-fiend's face. No wonder Jonathan Edwards said that Satan is the greatest blockhead who ever lived.

We recall that Jesus said the signs and wonders He performed indicated that the devil had been bound and all his former holdings were now being plundered (Matt. 12.22-29). Here's the proof of it: In perhaps the most public place in all of Jerusalem, the believers are mopping the floor with the devil, winning lost souls, healing broken bodies, sending wicked spirits packing, and generally making a great show of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom as it vanquishes the kingdom of darkness, death, and the lie.

People, seeing this boldness and these wonders, understood this to be not the sort of thing you rush into without careful consideration, even though they held the believers in high esteem (v. 13). A new day has dawned; new rules are in effect; and a new Ruler is on the throne. But Satan is not finished yet, nor ever will be this side of the Lord's return.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the devil is determined to frustrate the ongoing work of Christ. His most consistent tactic is to spread lies, deceit, self-interest, and disobedience within the Body of Christ, so that we believe the Lie rather than the plain teaching of the Word of God. But where believers and churches understand the importance of resisting the devil and are committed to the Lord's Word in doing so, blessings of Kingdom presence and progress can be expected.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly” (Acts 5.13).

Respect must be paid to those who were disinclined to join this Kingdom Movement. They were

apprehensive because they knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a real change must happen in their lives. This new life was not just an add-on to what they were already doing. No, it was a total turn around and change; and you couldn't just pretend that you were participating.

They'd seen first-hand that an everyday lie could be the last lie you ever told! Sin bore real consequences. And maybe they were just honest enough with themselves to admit that they didn't really want to play by all those constraining rules. I mean, loving God and your neighbors, sharing all your stuff, following the Ten Commandments, and then risking your life to pass along this info might be a real game-changer. And they weren't up to the task. Foolhardy. But honest, nonetheless.

What about us? Are we truly ready to join in with Jesus and the disciples to live fully in the Kingdom? With our Leader and Savior Jesus? To be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we can live successfully in our Personal Mission Field, sharing the good and bad news of the Gospel?

Or do we just want to esteem other believers highly, but not join in?

It is a serious decision. One that should not be made lightly.

Because what we decide makes all the difference:

“But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness...” (Matt. 6.33).

“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me...” (Jn. 12.25, 26).

“...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which* is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12.1, 2).

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2.10).

“I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end” (Ps. 119.112).

Let's dare to fully join in and follow our beloved Savior to the very end!

For reflection

1. How did the church in Jerusalem benefit from the act of discipline against the man and his wife?
2. How did the community in Jerusalem benefit from that act of discipline?
3. What can we learn about resisting the devil and all his temptations from this incident?

Earth was becoming like heaven, for their way of life, boldness of speech, wonders, for all besides. Like angels were they looked upon with wonder. They were unconcerned about ridicule, threats, perils. They were compassionate and beneficent. Some of them they helped with money, and some with words, and some with healing of their bodies and of their souls; they accomplished every kind of healing. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles 12

Pray Psalm 54.1-5.

Thank God for His constant help and sustaining grace. Call on Him to keep you through every trial or temptation you may face today.

Sing Psalm 54.1-5.

(Beatitudo: Father of Mercies, in Your Word)

Save us, O God, by Your great Name; vindicate us with power.

Answer our prayer, remove our shame, in this our desperate hour.

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Strangers and foes against us rise, threatening woe and strife.
They have not set You in their eyes, but seek to take our life.

You are the Helper of our soul; You will sustain and bless.
Recompense evil to our foe in Your great faithfulness.

4 The Old Ways Still Don't Work

Pray Psalm 142.1, 2, 5, 6.

I cry out to the LORD with my voice;
With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication.
I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare before Him my trouble...
I cried out to You, O LORD:
I said, "You *are* my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.
Attend to my cry,
For I am brought very low;
Deliver me from my persecutors,
For they are stronger than I.

Sing Psalm 142.1, 2, 5, 6.

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

With my voice, O Lord, I cry – hear my plea for mercy, Lord!
My complaint mounts up on high, bringing You my troubled word:
Refrain vv. 5, 6
Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song!

Read Acts 5.1-21; meditate on verses 17-21.

Preparation

1. What happened to the apostles?
2. What did they do when they were set free?

Meditation

He's not in the picture here, but the devil is behind the scenes, up to his old tricks. Which still don't work. He sowed the seed of jealousy into the religious leaders (yawn) and they arrested the apostles and locked 'em up (vv. 17, 18). We can almost hear the devil boasting among his henchmen, "That'll fix 'em!"

Well, no. Satan may have power to cloud and corrupt the hearts of self-centered men, but Jesus Christ has *all* power in heaven and on earth – even over locked prison doors (v. 19), even over Satan himself.

Released from detention, the apostles are sent right back into the fray (v. 20), and they go in obedience to the angel's command. Like their Master before them (Jn. 6.68), the apostles – and we their spiritual descendants – had the words of life. Undaunted and unafraid, they returned to the temple and picked up right where they left off.

I find this portion of chapter 5 rather comical. When you look at it as a contest between Satan and the Lord, it's a joke. Satan has learned nothing. He has no real power over the Kingdom of God. His old ways are as dumb and useless as ever. But he's still after it. He never quits.

The adversary has many ways to try to stop the ongoing work of Christ, but the Lord has more resources and power to defeat him again and again. We need to draw on that power by pursuing holiness, going out to serve our community, being willing to suffer if necessary, and staying on task with our mission.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The only time the old ways work is if we succumb to them. Then they work against us, not for us.

Note here what the religious leaders were indignant about (Acts 5.17): They were not suffering apoplexy because of grievous sin in their own lives, or a sin of someone in their congregation. No. They were “filled with indignation” because a multitude of sick people and those tormented by unclean spirits” were healed by the apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reminds one a bit of the chief priests, scribes, and the elders plotting to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him, but “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people” (Matt. 26.3-5). They weren’t concerned about the trickery or murder plot; they were only concerned about upsetting the folks because of the religious feast. Wouldn’t want any unpleasantness to spoil a religious holiday.

Is it possible that we in the church today get caught up in these same old ways?

We can get truly exercised about the Ten Commandments not being allowed on the courthouse steps, or about any number of things that we find reprehensible; however, we are not equally obsessed about our own sins and shortcomings (Matt. 7.1-5) .

Is the Law of God stamped permanently on our hearts? (Ex. 20.1-17)

Do we keep His Word, and treasure His commands?

Is His Law the apple of our eye?

Do we write His Words on the tablet of our hearts? (Prov. 7.1-3)

We must really guard against becoming like the Pharisees and Sadducees. We must make sure that Satan’s old ways still don’t work. We must be sure that we keep the laser beam of judgment on our own hearts so that we are not filled with indignation about all the wrong things.

Jeremiah has some bad and good news for us regarding the situation at hand: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” We can. Know it. Then repent, be filled with His Spirit, and go forward in victory because God says: “...I will set My eyes on them for good...” “...I will give them a new heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart” (Jer. 17.9; 24.6, 7).

For reflection

1. Why do you think the religious leaders were so upset at the apostles? Do we see anything like this today?
2. What can you do to always keep the “laser beam of judgment” shining into your own soul?
3. From this passage, how does the ongoing work of Christ continue even when the world and the devil oppose it? What are the implications of this for your walk with and work for the Lord?

There is no prison so dark, so strong, but God can visit his people in it, and, if he pleases, fetch them out. Recoveries from sickness, releases out of trouble, are granted, not that we may enjoy the comforts of life, but that God may be honored with the services of our life. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 5.17-25

Pray Psalm 142.3, 4, 5-7.

Pray that God will free your soul from any prisons of fear, doubt, or sin, and that His Spirit will fill and empower you to praise and serve Him throughout this day.

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Sing Psalm 142.3, 4, 5-7.

(Dix: For the Beauty of the Earth)

When my spirit faints away, You my falt'ring pathway know.
Where I take my journey they traps have hidden to my woe.

Refrain vv. 5, 6

Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song!

Lord, look to my right and see: None takes notice of my plight.
Is there refuge left for me? Is my soul out of Your sight?

Refrain

Hear my cry, Lord, I am low! They are strong who seek my soul.
Jesus frees from every foe; He will keep and make me whole!

Refrain

Out of prison lead me, Lord; thanks and praise to You shall be.
Righteous men armed with Your Word will Your grace bestow on me.

Refrain

5 Once More, with Emphasis

Pray Psalm 86.1-3.

Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me;
For I *am* poor and needy.
Preserve my life, for I *am* holy;
You are my God;
Save Your servant who trusts in You!
Be merciful to me, O Lord,
For I cry to You all day long.

Sing Psalm 86.1-3.

(Andrews: *Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven*)

Bow down Your ear, O Lord and hear me; I am afflicted and much in need!
Rescue my godly soul, be near me; save me, O God, all my crying heed!
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me, all day long I pray and plead.

Read Acts 5.1-28; meditate on verses 21-28.

Preparation

1. Why were the religious leaders angry at the apostles?
2. What were the apostles doing when they found them?

Meditation

Talk about the blinding power of sin! Didn't they just try this a short while ago? And did it work then? So why should they think all this pomp and pressure, this huffing and puffing and bullying, would have any effect this time around?

These religious leaders could not explain what they were seeing, and they – as ever – feared inciting the people against themselves. So all their nefarious work was done very hush-hush and on the sly (v. 26). No wonder they were scratching their heads, wondering what this would come to (v. 24). They had indeed rendered a judgment and instructed the disciples not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. There it is: an imposition on the disciples' religious freedom! This time they would add a little emphasis to make their point.

But the apostles had already insisted they must obey God and not men. So they did. And they disobeyed knowing full well that they'd probably be right back there again, and maybe this time with a little more than a threat imposed against them (v. 40). But by their disobedience, the Good News of Jesus spread throughout the city ((v. 28).

Believers will always be opposed as we pursue the ongoing work of Christ. People won't care how many good works we do, how clear and loving our presentation of the Gospel might be, or how determined we show ourselves. Some people simply hate the idea of not being their own god; they will not bow to the Lord for any reason, and they will resist His Kingdom as it unfolds right in front of their eyes.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Once More Again, with Emphasis”, because I need to hear it. And maybe you do too?

These disciples were being persecuted for their obedience to God and for their faith in Him. But their prayer request is not for relief. It is for courage: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that

with all boldness they may speak Your word...” (Acts 4.29).

And when they were rescued from jail, the angel didn’t tell them to go home and hide. No. He tells them to “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5.20).

So without complaint, or another thought, “when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught” (Acts 5.21). There was no vacation time, or rest and relaxation after a rough night. No. They were up early and back at being extremely obedient.

It's almost as if they were taking God’s Word seriously!

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23.4).

“Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance, *with* the recompense of God; He will come and save you” (Is. 35.4).

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1.7).

All of these profound promises are for us, as well. They are not just words. They are our life! (Deut. 32.47). And by them, we can live our lives as confidently and courageously as the disciples did.

We just need to be as obedient and trusting as they were; not waiting for some governmental intervention, whilst whining about our religious freedoms being impinged upon.

Realizing my shortcomings, I can repent, and begin praying, pleading for courage and confidence. Looking only to our Savior for help. Rejoicing in the gift and power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, once more, with emphasis, we can boldly say:

“The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13.6)

For reflection

1. Why did the apostles disobey the religious authorities? Why were they right in doing so?
2. How can we find the courage we need to be faithful and obedient witnesses for Jesus?
3. How can believers encourage one another in this high and holy calling?

Had Christ been exalted to give dominion to Israel, the chief priests would have welcomed him. But repentance and remission of sins are blessings they neither valued nor saw their need of; therefore they, by no means, admitted his doctrine. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 5.26-33*

Pray Psalm 86.10-17.

Call on the Lord for strength, that you might be faithful in following and serving Him throughout this day.

Sing Psalm 86.10-17.

(Andrews: *Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven*)

For You are great, You wondrous deeds do; You are the only and sovereign Lord.
Teach me Your way, let me give heed to, with all my heart, Savior, all Your Word!
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me, praise Your Name forever, Lord!

Great is Your mercy, Lord, toward me; You have delivered my soul from hell.
Though dreadful foes and threats arrayed be, You will Your grace and Your mercy tell!
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me, slow to anger, loving well!

Sin, Surge, Suffering, Rejoicing: Acts 5

Turn to me, Lord; be gracious to me; grant me Your strength; save Your servant, Lord!
Let me a sign of something good see; shame all who hate me beneath Your Word.
Lord, be gracious to me, Lord, be gracious to me, for You help me, sovereign Lord!

6 “Take That!”

Pray Psalm 57.9-11.

I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.
For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And Your truth unto the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory be above all the earth.

Sing Psalm 57.9-11.

(Fabien: *Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*)

Praise and thanks among the nations I will sing with all my might!
For Your truth and love are stationed far above the highest height!
Be exalted o’er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Read Acts 5.1-42; meditate on verses 29-42.

Preparation

1. How did Peter and the others justify their actions?
2. What did the religious leaders do?

Meditation

It is more important to obey God than to obey men (v. 29). Didn’t they hear them the first time they insisted on this (Acts 4.19)? And it’s also important to make the most of every opportunity for proclaiming the Good News (vv. 30-32; cf. Eph. 5.15-17), no matter who gets offended or what may be the accompanying cost.

The word “Prince” in verse 31, is in the Greek, ἀρχηγὸν (*archegon*), and means something more like “captain” or even “author”. It’s the same word used to describe Jesus in Hebrews 12.2. Jesus, the apostles explained, writes *our* rules and directs *our* actions. Not you.

The apostles and other disciples had made the Kingdom turn, and there was no turning back. They were caught up in the agenda of Christ and the power of His Spirit (v. 32), and they certainly could not deny what they had seen and heard and knew to be true.

Gamaliel’s little history lesson wins the day, but the disciples still get a beating out of the deal (v. 40: “Take that!”). Does Satan stand to applaud this little “victory”? He is knocked down again as the apostles leave “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (v. 41). Then it’s back to the ongoing work of King Jesus: “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ” (v. 42). Take that!

The effect of this situation was to strengthen the Church, advance the Kingdom, weaken the devil’s grip on many unbelievers in Jerusalem, and prepare the hearts of many religious leaders for coming to Christ (see Acts 6.1-6).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It is refreshing to see how Peter never forgets to remind them of what they have done.

Sin, Surge, Suffering, Rejoicing: Acts 5

So often, we mistakenly think that grace overlooks sin. It does not overlook it, because how can you offer grace for a crime that doesn't exist?

How can we possibly appreciate the grace that God offers us, if we are not overcome with our own wretchedness and intense need of forgiveness?

Peter did not want to miss any opportunity to show the need for God's grace to be bestowed.

When he and the other apostles answered their accusers, they stated that, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5.29).

And here are the reasons why:

1. God raised up Jesus Christ from the dead. By the way, it is the same Jesus Whom you murdered (Acts 5.30).
2. God has exalted this same Jesus to His right hand to be Prince and Savior (Acts 5.31).
3. God's reason for doing this was to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5.31).
4. We, and the Holy Spirit in us, are witnesses to this murder, resurrection, and resolution of God (Acts 5.32).
5. Those who obey God have received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5.32).

And Gamaliel spoke reason Number 6:

6. If this work and these people speaking of it are from God, you cannot overthrow it (Acts 5.39).

They knew, they said; we know, we say: God's grace is desperately needed by every person who has ever lived or will live. And the amazing thing about God is that He continues to give it!

Here is a short history of grace: "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6.8).

"For the LORD God *is* a sun and a shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good *thing* will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84.11).

"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5.20, 21).

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8.9).

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us..." (Eph. 1.7, 8).

"For by grace you have been saved through faith...it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2.8).

We, like the religious rulers of old, should be grateful to "Take That!" from the Holy Spirit, because it always serves to remind us of our need of a Savior; and that we have a Savior, full of grace and forgiveness.

For reflection

1. Why is it important that we always obey God rather than men?
2. What is grace? How would you explain grace to an unbelieving friend?
3. How does our obeying God rather than men affect other believers? Affect the unbelievers in our life?

Let us then be imitators of his patience; and if we suffer for his name's sake, let us glorify him. For he has set us this example in himself, and we have believed that such is the case. Polycarp of Smyrna (69-155), Letter to the Philippians 8

Pray Psalm 57.1-8.

Ask the Lord to make you bold for Jesus today, to love as He would love and bear witness to Him as He leads. Ask Him to deliver you from all fear of what others might think or do, and to make your heart

steadfast in serving and bearing witness to Him.

Sing Psalm 57.1-8.

(Fabien: [*Praise the Lord, Ye Heavens Adore Him*](#))

Lord, be gracious, gracious to me, for my soul retreats in You.
In Your shadow keep me safely till the storms of life are through.
I will cry to You, the Most High; You do all things well for me.
You will save me when I thus cry, routing all who threaten me.

Send Your truth and lovingkindness; raging lions seek my soul.
Threats and sland'rous words without rest they against me fiercely roll.
Be exalted o'er the heavens, let Your glory fill the earth!
To Your Name all praise be given, let all men proclaim Your worth!

Nets and pits they set before me; overwhelmed, my soul bows down.
Let them all in their own works be thrown and scattered on the ground.
Let my heart no more be shaken, I will sing Your praises, Lord!
Harp and glory, now awaken to extol God's faithful Word!

7 Unstoppable

Pray Psalm 52.8, 9.

But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.
I will praise You forever,
Because You have done *it*;
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

Sing Psalm 52.8, 9.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

Read Acts 5.1-42; meditate on verses 38, 39.

Preparation

1. What happened to cause the growth of the Gospel in this chapter?
2. How did God work through Peter and the others?

Meditation

Gamaliel had it right. The Gospel is so powerful that nothing can prevent it from running its course and fulfilling God's purposes. Not Satan (v. 3). Not treachery within the ranks of God's people (vv. 1-11). Neither sickness nor unclean spirits (vv. 14-16). Not the opposition of sinful men (vv. 17-21). Not threats or physical harm (vv. 27, 28, 40-42). Once God gets hold of people and His Spirit is at work within them, willing and doing according to God's good pleasure (Phil. 2.13), nothing can stop the progress of His Word and Kingdom. Like a growing stone, it will increase and advance until all the kingdoms and powers and machinations of men have been overcome by it (Dan. 2.44, 45).

If only we believed that like Peter and the others did! In our day, the Gospel seems powerless to accomplish the great works of healing, conversion, restoration, and community we see in the book of Acts. But it's not the Gospel which lacks power; it is, rather, those who profess to believe the Gospel but do not live from within its purposes or power.

In Acts we see the Living Water of Jesus flowing to, filling, refreshing, renewing, and overflowing from those who believed in Him. In our day, too many believers treat the Living Water of the Gospel like a water bottle, to which we turn only when we feel thirsty, which is not all that often. We take as much of the Gospel as we like, and we avoid any aspects of it that would threaten our comfort or is not in line with our convenience. It's no wonder we do not see the progress of the Kingdom in our day in the ways we read about in the book of Acts.

Like Achan in Joshua's day, we have taken as much of the Gospel as we like and buried it in our tent, to draw on at our convenience or for our comfort.

But the work of God, as Gamaliel knew, and as Ananias and Sapphira learned the hard way, does not

conform to the whims and wants of self-interested people. The Gospel will erupt again in our day, and sooner than later, I believe. And when it does, will we be found among those through whom it surges against a sinful and stubborn age, or will we try to keep it bottled up in the prison of our desires, to use as we see fit?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

The gospel according to Gamaliel is a gospel of warning and power: "...keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5.38, 39). And who in their right mind wants to do that?

He was a knowledgeable rabbi familiar with the power of God. Just not His grace. Gamaliel is the same rabbi who infused Saul of Tarsus with his Pharisaical and murderous spirit towards the Gospel of Jesus. But Gamaliel was certainly right about the power!

God declared to Moses the words that He wanted spoken to Pharaoh:

"But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth" (Ex. 9.16).

David tells us: "God has spoken once, twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God" (Ps. 62.11).

Jesus told us to pray: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (Matt. 6.13).

Paul, once Saul of Tarsus, said: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..." (Rom. 1.16).

And Paul longs for us to "know...the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead..." (Eph. 1.18-20).

The writer of the book of Hebrews said that Jesus is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of God's person, "upholding all things by the word of His power..." (Heb. 1.3).

Gamaliel's gospel neglected grace. And repentance, forgiveness, love, and the Promised Helper.

God's Gospel is complete. And extraordinarily equipping: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me..." (Acts 1.8).

Powerful. Holy. Unstoppable. God's Gospel.

We can either get on board or get run over by it!

For reflection

1. How can you know more of the power of the Gospel at work in your life?
2. Looking at Acts 5, what kinds of things could keep you from knowing more of that power?
3. Do you pray daily for God to grant you more Holy Spirit power to be a witness for Jesus Christ?

*What is "of God" is bound to stand, even if the whole world is against him. Therefore, faith, which is sustained by the eternal truth of God, ought to remain unshaken against any assaults whatever of Satan and people. Even if heaven falls, our salvation is secure, for God is its author and protector. Because God guards the kingdom of Christ, no force will ever be able to overthrow it. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 5.33-39**

Pray Psalm 52.1-7.

Praise God that He loves goodness, truth, and righteousness. Ask Him to make these qualities more present in and visible through you today, despite whatever challenges or opposition you may face.

Sin, Surge, Suffering, Rejoicing: Acts 5

Sing Psalm 52.1-7.

(Warrington: [*Give to Our God Immortal Praise*](#))

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.

Sin, Surge, Suffering, Rejoicing: Acts 5

For reflection or discussion

1. How should we expect churches today to *sign* the Kingdom of God in their communities?
2. Should we expect everyone in our community to be thrilled about this? Explain.
3. How can churches prepare their people for more courageous and consistent witness for Christ?
4. Is a church that does not sign the Kingdom really a church in the sense of what we see in Acts? Explain.
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 5?

For prayer:

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