

Text: Acts 5:17-42

Title: Second Persecution

Date/Location: Wednesday 8/30/2023 (rev. from Sunday April 22, 2012)
at FBC

Reading and Introduction to the Passage

Basically, this passage records that the nascent church was succeeding (15:11, 12, 14, 15-16), but opposition arose against them.

I. Narrative of Apostles' Preaching and Second Imprisonment,

5:17-28

V. 17 - Sometimes non-Christian people get very mad at you when you preach Christ. Especially that is the case when the church has high esteem among the populace and people are added to the church as in 5:13-14.

V. 28 – The high priest was mad that the council's orders were not followed (4:18, 5:28), and mad that the apostles were, at least in part, blaming the Jewish leaders for the death of Jesus.

Yes, the Jewish people in this time period, especially their leaders, had a hand in killing Jesus. They are blameworthy. However, their sins do not transfer down the family tree to their sons and daughters in future generations as if we can blame Jews generally for doing that. Anyone who thinks that Jews today are Christ killers are badly wrong. Jews today who do not believe in Jesus are lost and in need of divine grace, but they are not to be called out as especially worthy of reproach on the account of what their forefathers did. Remember, the Gentile forefathers also participated in the killing of Christ through the hand of the Roman authorities.

II. Issue of Civil Disobedience, 5:29

A. We may be forced to disobey the civil authority someday. How do we tell when? When Scriptural boundaries of their authority are

crossed and they are commanding you to do things (or not do things) which are clearly contrary to God's word and will.

1. This is a clear-cut example. The Lord told them in Acts 1:8 to be his witnesses. In Acts 5:20-21, we see an angel of the Lord opening the prison and commanding them to go to the temple and speak the message of life. Now some men come along and try to countermand these clear commands from God and His messenger. Which do you follow? Clearly God gets priority. There are things that belong to God, and things that belong to Caesar, and gospel preaching clearly belongs in the first category.
2. Taxes and even high tax rates are *not* clear cut examples, even if some of the money is used for things that you do not approve.
3. Government commanding you to provide abortion services is clear cut. Government commanding abortion, like in China's forced one-child policy, is clear cut.

B. The text makes the bold stance of the apostles crystal clear. They were not going to listen. The "authority" of the chief priests and scribes and council did not extend to them in this matter.

III. Summary of the Good News about Jesus, 5:30-32

- A. Jewish leaders are guilty of murder of Jesus by hanging him on a tree.
- B. God raised up Jesus from the dead.
- C. God exalted Him at His right hand to be Prince and Savior. See Acts 7:56 where Stephen saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. Maybe He was standing to receive Stephen into heaven upon his imminent death.
- D. Jesus was exalted so that repentance and forgiveness of sins would come to Israel. The means and the result are listed here. And yes, repentance is part of the gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus.
- E. The apostles are His witnesses – commissioned for the purpose.
- F. The Holy Spirit is also a witness. This is interesting.

1. The Spirit is working through those He lives within to themselves be witnesses.
2. He also works on the unbeliever to bring him / her to faith in Christ by the ministry of gospel conviction (John 16:8-11).
3. All those who obey the gospel (by repentant faith) receive the Spirit as a gift. That case is closed. Romans 8:9 also closes that case.

IV. The Apostles Beaten, v. 33-40

- A. Gamaliel was a respected leader among them. He saw the fury of the other leaders and gave some advice that was seasoned with some wisdom of years. He had recollection of some previous leaders of cults that eventually disappeared. He advised to not potentially fight against God for the benefit on the other side of that fight—which would be nil because the movement would come to nothing anyway. His words had some truth about them with respect to the sovereignty of God.
- B. The governing authority stepped outside of its Scriptural boundary to beat the apostles. They thought they were doing God a service (John 16:2), but they were not. Civil disobedience was not an option at this moment because the authorities had the power of force over the apostles. But civil disobedience later was possible, and they did it.
- C. They commanded the apostles once again not to talk about Jesus. The whole scene strikes me as childish on the part of the leaders. They don't get their way, so they threaten and use violence and tell the disciples not to say anything more. Don't they have anything more substantive than that? Or anything better to do? Like teaching the Law to the people and running the temple in a godly way, as they are supposed to do?
- D. Gamaliel was a prophet of sorts without knowing it. If the plan is of men, it will come to nothing, but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it. And indeed, they did not overthrow it. According to Gamaliel's wise words, then, it is clear that the "Way" was a work of God! It has not been overthrown by Satan nor by human authorities in 2,000 years.

V. Joy and Continued Preaching, v. 41-42

- A. The disciples were joyful that they suffered for Christ. They were happy that God saw them as “worthy” of Him to suffer shame. This was a confidence-builder in their own state of salvation and their ministry. They were doing something right to make the enemy mad. God considered them up to the task of suffering shame now. Before, Jesus had allowed them to be scattered but not suffer. Now some months later they were the ones suffering.
- B. We need to avoid a persecution complex that makes us think whenever we are chastised it is because we are right. Sometimes we are wrong!
- C. Daily they continued teaching and preaching (proclaiming good news) about Jesus the Christ (Messiah). They did this in large gatherings and in small ones in homes.

Conclusion

The text prepares the church for the reality of persecution and suffering for the name of Christ—the Lord told them it would happen, and it did and will continue. Luke’s text also prepares us as to how to respond when authorities tell us not to preach Christ—we simply ignore them and keep on doing what God has called us to do.

In terms of Luke’s purpose in writing, this shows Theophilus the ongoing success and challenges of the young church as well as the unreasonableness of the authorities in attacking the church. The leaders are clearly concerned about reputation and power, not about the truth, or remission of sins, or repentance. The apostles brought God’s word and will to bear on the matter; the leaders brought sheer authority and power.

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