

I. Introduction

Good morning! Today we will continue our study in Acts 5. Last week, we read about how the apostles were arrested and thrown in jail because the religious leaders were jealous of their ministry. But, during the night after they were arrested, an angel led them out of jail and told them to continue preaching the gospel. **Acts 5:20, "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."** This verse still applies to us today; we are all commanded to, "Go, stand, and tell the people the Good News of forgiveness of sins and eternal life received by grace through faith in Jesus.

The following morning, when the high priest and the Sadducees heard that the apostles were no longer in the jail and instead were preaching in the temple courts, they sent the guards to arrest them again. This brings us to today's passage, Acts 5:27-42.

II. Scripture Acts 5:27-42 (NIV 1984)

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." 29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. 35 Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. 36 Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. 37 After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. 38 Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

40 His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

III. Teaching

For a moment let's focus on the contrast between Peter and Gamaliel in this passage. Gamaliel was a highly trained scholar of the Scriptures and was respected by all of the people. When the Sanhedrin was about to demand that Peter and the apostles be put to death, Gamaliel stepped in and argued that they should be released instead. After having the apostles put outside, Gamaliel argued for restraint. Gamaliel was probably sincere in his desire for mercy, but he was also acting as a politician. He must have wanted to prevent the Sanhedrin from doing something that would turn the people against them and that would bring conflict with the Roman authorities.



Gamaliel's words seem wise to many people, but they are political half-truths; in his speech, Gamaliel is not focused on knowing the truth or on honoring God. Gamaliel's commitment to his nation and the Sanhedrin appears to be greater than his commitment to God's ways and God's truth. Let's take a closer look at Gamaliel's words; I think we will notice some errors in his thinking. **Acts 5:35-37, "Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered."**

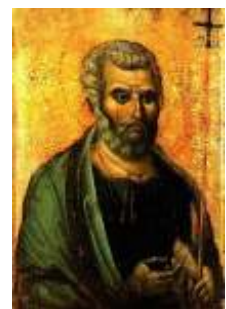
Gamaliel begins well. He urges the Sanhedrin to think carefully before taking action; that is good advice. But next, by speaking of Theudas and Judas the Galilean, Gamaliel implicitly places Jesus in the same category as these two discredited, false messiahs. That is a serious error. Those false messiahs did no miracles, left no wise teachings, and certainly did not rise from the dead. Many people make a similar mistake today when they attempt to place Jesus in the same category as various religious teachers in history. But Jesus is completely different and unique. Jesus claimed to be God, and His miracles and resurrection, plus the fulfilled prophecies of Scripture provide strong evidence for the truth of His claim.

Gamaliel continues, saying in **Acts 5:38-39, "Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."** Gamaliel correctly points out that the work of God cannot be stopped. However, Gamaliel is basically advising the Sanhedrin to wait and see if the work of the apostles succeeds in order to know if it is from God.

The problem with this is that visible success is the wrong standard to use if you are searching for truth. God's plan and work are always victorious in the end, but during the short span of a human lifetime we see only a small portion of what God is doing; we can't use success as a standard for recognizing God's work because we do not know how anything really turns out in the end. When deciding what to believe, instead of taking a "go with what works," attitude, we should make a sincere effort to search for the truth by examining the evidence. At this point, Gamaliel makes no effort to look at the evidence Peter speaks of, Gamaliel just looks for an easy solution to the immediate situation.

According to church tradition, Gamaliel later believed in Jesus and became a Christian. The Catholic church even honors Gamaliel as a saint. But on the day described in Acts 5, Gamaliel was a political fence-sitter who was unwilling to take a clear stand for or against Jesus and who used logically flawed arguments to argue for compromise.

Peter's attitude provides a sharp contrast to Gamaliel's compromise. Peter was a fisherman; he lacked formal education and had no social standing. But Peter had been with Jesus. And Peter had been through the humbling experience of denying Jesus three times after Jesus was arrested and later being restored to leadership among the apostles by the risen Jesus. Peter was finished with compromise. When the Sanhedrin attempted to intimidate him, Peter gave a simple reply. **Acts 5:29b, "We must obey God rather than men!"** These are the words of men who have been set free by knowing Jesus. Peter and the other apostles were no longer concerned with the opinions of men. Their concern was to be loyal and obedient to God and His Kingdom.



They gave a simple answer that clearly explained why they would never give in to the threats of the Sanhedrin. But they did not stop there, they continued, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus to the Sanhedrin. **Acts 5:30-32, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."** The Good News is for all people in every nation. But here, in front of the leaders of Israel, the apostles proclaim the Good News to Israel and they emphasize the evidence of their own eyewitness testimony and the confirmation of the Holy Spirit. The apostles also point

out that the members of the Sanhedrin are very much in need of forgiveness, because they judged Jesus and sent Him to the cross.

No one likes to be reminded of their own sin, and the Sanhedrin was furious at the apostles for asserting that they were guilty for having Jesus crucified. But that was their great sin. And, the truth is, it is also our great sin. The Sanhedrin was directly involved in the death of Jesus, but we also are involved and guilty because Jesus died for our sins. Take a look at **1 John 2:1-2**, “**My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**” Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, but this also means that He died for the sins of each person, for my sins and yours.

Mel Gibson, when he made his movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” expressed his own responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion by holding the nail himself in the crucifixion scene. In the movie, you don’t see his face; you see only Mel Gibson’s hand holding the nail as it is driven into Jesus’ hand. This is a good image to meditate on. If you had been there when Jesus was crucified, you could have looked at the faces of all the people, and you would not have seen Mel Gibson’s face, nor would you have seen my face. Even so, from a spiritual standpoint, we were there. Like Mel Gibson, my face was hidden, but my hand was there, holding the nail. I also had a hand in killing Jesus, because He died for my sins. It was my sin that sent Jesus to the cross. Jesus took my sin upon Himself on the cross and His blood ran down for me.



Like the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, we are all responsible for Jesus’ death. Yet, in the riches of His mercy and grace, our Lord freely offers salvation to all of us. We all sin in many ways. It is the fallen human condition and none of us can escape the influence of sin and death. That is why we need to hear the Good News. **Romans 5:8**, “**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” Jesus came to provide forgiveness of sins, salvation from sin and death and reconciliation with God for all who believe in Him. Jesus took upon Himself the death penalty that we each deserve for our sins. He died in our place, that we might have the free gift of eternal life.

When we trust in Jesus, we are reconciled with our Creator and we receive citizenship in heaven. **Philippians 3:20** “**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.**” When we believe in Jesus and become Christians, we receive a new citizenship because we have placed ourselves under the authority of the Lord. In this world, we are strangers and sojourners, longing to go home to heaven, waiting for our Lord to come and take us home to be with Him forever.

As citizens of Japan, or America, or the Philippines, or whatever country we might belong to, we have a duty and obligation to be faithful to our own nation. Even if we are in a foreign land, we should not do anything to undermine the government or reputation of our homeland. But as Christians, our highest allegiance and most important loyalty is to our true home country, the Kingdom of God, that is heaven. When we believe in Jesus, we receive this new citizenship as a free gift. We are still citizens of our home country on earth, but we become, as it were, dual citizens with citizenship in heaven as well. And, if there is ever a conflict between our obligations to heaven and our obligations to our earthly nation, then heaven takes precedence, because earthly nations are temporary, but heaven is our permanent, eternal home.

In today’s passage, we can see that Peter and the other apostles understood this very well. They were brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest authority of their Jewish nation. But they refused to obey the commands of the Sanhedrin, because, as they said (**Acts 5:29b**), “**We must obey God rather than men!**” When the demands of earthly authorities conflict with our allegiance to heaven, we also must answer the same. “**We must obey God rather than men!**”

The apostles were faithful in their service to Jesus Christ; they were loyal to heaven, and in their faithful service and unswerving allegiance to the Lord, they found new joy and meaning. They defied the earthly authority of the Sanhedrin, and for this they were rebuked and flogged. But take a look at their response to earthly shame and bodily pain. **Acts 5:41-42**, “**The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing**

because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” The apostles did not draw back or hesitate after they suffered persecution for the sake of the Name of Jesus. Instead, they were filled with joy and a renewed passion to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is Christ, Savior and Lord. Allegiance and faithful service given to the King of kings and Lord of lords, to the Creator God who is above all things and to our Lord Jesus who died for us, brings joy and heavenly reward.

IV. Conclusion

In this world, we all have many obligations and loyalties. The demands of family, friends, workplace, and nation are many, and all of these obligations are important. But our eternal citizenship is in heaven and we owe our first allegiance and our highest loyalty to God. God created the heavens and the earth and He gave life to all. No one is independent of God. We all owe our very existence to Him. And, He has proved that He is worthy of our love and allegiance. In the person of Jesus Christ, God came into this world and gave His life as a ransom for ours. He died for us. Therefore, we should live for Him. May the Lord give us courage, wisdom, and strength to follow the example of Peter and the apostles, so that we also might be loyal and faithful citizens of heaven.

Let's close for today with a reading from Psalm 145. In this psalm, David reminds us of the many reasons that the Lord is worthy of our praise and allegiance.

Psalm 145:8-13, A psalm of praise. Of David.

8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

10 All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you.

11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might,

12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

Let's pray.

V. Prayer

Dear Lord, Creator and King over all,

We praise Your Holy Name and give thanks for the wonders of Your grace and mercy. Your power and wisdom are beyond all human understanding. Your glory is eternal and unchanging. Your love is unending and perfect. Lord God Almighty, pour out Your grace and mercy on us again today. We confess we are sinners and we are desperately in need of the forgiveness of sins and salvation that You have provided through the cross of Jesus Christ. Wash us clean by the blood of Christ, fill us with Your Holy Spirit, set our feet on a good path and teach us to walk with You always. Thank You, Lord, for this amazing salvation. Thank You, Lord, for adopting us as Your sons and daughters. Thank You for giving us citizenship in heaven. Teach us to be loyal citizens of our heavenly homeland; help us that we might be faithful to You, our King. May our allegiance to our Lord Jesus never waiver, may we walk in truth, by Your grace and the leading of Your Spirit. In Jesus' precious Name I pray, amen.