

AND EVERY DAY,
IN THE TEMPLE
AND FROM HOUSE
TO HOUSE, THEY
KEPT RIGHT ON
TEACHING AND
PREACHING JESUS
AS THE CHRIST.

A C T S 5 : 4 2

THE POWER

OF THE CHURCH

DATE

October 24 & 25

WEEK

4 of 5

OVERVIEW

Acts 5-6

KEY VERSE

Acts 5:42

SETTING THE STAGE

As we have seen, the Book of Acts is fast-paced in both writing and story. It is truly an “active” book. There was excitement at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the healing of the lame man. Even though there were times of opposition by the political and religious leaders of the day, people were excited about being part of this new movement in following Jesus as “the Church.” Believers were being added daily to the thousands who were already part of the body of Christ.

These believers had learned to stand in unity and care for one another. And yet, at the beginning of Acts 5, stark reality is revealed in the story. Quite literally and figuratively, the truth stops dead in its tracks. In those days, people had given their resources for the good of others in the Church who needed food, money, or other items. It was not mandated to sell your possessions and give the money to the Church; it was a free choice even down to the specifics of what you gave.

Ananias and Saphira, a married couple in the Church, conspired to sell a piece of property for the benefit of the Church but hold some of the profit back while representing they were giving the full amount. For some, it would be considered a simple lie. However, this “simple lie” had devastating consequences. Ananias and Saphira did not come together presenting the money, but separately, hours apart. Ananias came first, speaking the lie that the amount given was the full amount received. When confronted by Peter as to why he had chosen to lie about this matter, a lie to God, not men, Ananias fell dead. Saphira, who came a couple of hours later and made the same claim, told the same lie and also suffered the same consequence, death on the spot. *Continued on page 32 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Ready to Offer Hope
2. Ready to Obey
3. Ready to Speak
4. Ready to Rejoice

THINGS TO KNOW

- The High Priest was the supreme religious leader for the Israelites yet did not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah.
- The Sadducees were a religiopolitical group who worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of Rome but were more concerned with politics than religion.¹

THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

Setting the Stage, continued > Understandably this caught the attention of the people in Jerusalem. Acts 5:11 says, “*And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.*” Their story provides the backdrop for our verses today.

Introduction

Currently, the Church is experiencing an unprecedented season of governmental restrictions and guidelines for gatherings. While health concerns are the driving force, to some it feels like interference. This provides an exceptional opportunity to review the purpose of the Church.

The Church is a group of people, redeemed by Jesus, and purposed to live on mission with Him. Once Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to give birth to His Church. While churches come in all shapes and sizes, the true Church of Jesus is comprised of all who have confessed Him as Savior and Lord. A living organism, His body, the Church, serves to extend grace and truth on earth and to proclaim Jesus’ glory to all people.²

As part of the living organism that is the Church, we look to God’s Word in Acts for direction. Not for theology per se, but for history. When Luke gives us glimpses of the early Church, he provides guidance as we seek to function as a church, powered by God, to proclaim Jesus to a lost world.

1. READY TO OFFER HOPE

ACTS 5:12-16 *At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico.¹³ But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.¹⁴ And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,¹⁵ to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.¹⁶ Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*

As the new Church grew, the apostles gathered in “Solomon’s Portico” (Acts 5:12). They were meeting physical and spiritual needs and were held in high esteem by the people. Hope was in the air, though that specific word may not have been used. The people were enamored by the miracles they had seen and heard about from the apostles. Notice there were those who “*dared not associate*” with these people and others who “*held them in high esteem.*” This led to the point of decision for some. When God makes Himself known, there will always be a decision to make and a direction to go.

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¹ www.gotquestions.org

² Louie Giglio, *The Jesus Bible*, Zondervan, 2019, p. 5-6.

Yet undeniably, the signs and wonders taking place captured the attention of both the common and elite people of the day. Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie states, “signs were an outward evidence of the inner working of the power of the Lord in a person or situation; while wonders caused one to be gripped by awe. Something beyond human ability was involved in the healings and transformed lives which were occurring as a result of Christ’s Spirit in the apostles.”³ As the people drew closer and saw these signs and wonders, they were filled with hope.

Webster’s Dictionary defines “hope” as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” Other people were receiving miracles, so why not them? It is a fair question and natural response to be hopeful in those situations. When the Church offers hope in the name of Jesus, we are following the lead of the apostles in the early Church. Later, in Romans 5:5, Paul reminds us, “*and hope does not disappoint.*”

In Acts 5, we see families bringing their sick and tormented in the hope that Peter’s shadow would fall on them. It was not Peter’s shadow that healed them, but God at work, using His mighty power for miracles so that many would believe in Him. Can you imagine the activity of the Holy Spirit so evident in your life that people would simply want to have your shadow cast upon them? Peter had failed in ways like no other disciple other than Judas Iscariot, yet God powerfully used Peter to offer hope to those in Jerusalem in the first century. This fact serves as a reminder that God can and will use those who completely surrender to Him, giving hope to all of us.

Acts 5:16 indicates that people gathered from all around, bringing their sick and afflicted. I love the last five words of verse 16, “*and they were all being healed.*” Significantly, all these people were healed. There were no failures, and none sent away because he or she “did not have faith to be healed.” These were days of mighty power when God was speaking to Israel and telling them that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah and Savior.⁴ This new and rapidly growing Church, powered by the Holy Spirit, was making Jesus famous. (Isaiah 26:8) As a result, people came from all over with a heart of hope for a miracle.

Often as Dr. Young prepares to deliver a sermon, he will quote John 12:32, which says, *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* Dr. Young knows and teaches us well that Jesus is the one who saves, heals, and draws all people to Himself. Our job as the Church is to lift Him up, thus offering hope to all who hear. This hope offered today is hope fulfilled in a transformed life. The greatest miracle of all is the transformation of a lost sinner into a child of God by the grace of God.⁵

2. READY TO OBEY

ACTS 5:17-21A *But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.¹⁸ They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said,²⁰ “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”²¹ Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.*

Notice the High Priest and the Sadducees were filled with jealousy. The Sadducees were the

³ Dr. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Master the New Testament-Acts*, Word Publishing, 1983, p. 121.

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 339.

⁵ Ibid.

religious leaders of the day. These were not common bystanders; these were leaders with power, yet they were still jealous. The word “jealousy” translates the Greek word “zelos,” which can also mean “zeal.” The zeal of the religious leaders was to wipe out this new movement.⁶ This zealous jealousy moved them to put Peter and John into a public jail, just as they would treat a common criminal of the day. They did not want them to have a voice with the masses of people in Jerusalem.

However, the Sadducees did not realize they were not dealing merely with flesh and blood, but with spiritual forces. They had two specific reasons for arresting Peter and John. 1) They defied the law by preaching in the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:18) Though for Peter and John, it was an act of obedience to God. 2) They were giving evidence that Jesus was alive and active through life-changing signs and wonders, which caused the Church to grow in numbers daily.

The traditional teachings of the religious leaders had not captured the people’s hearts nor attracted many followers. But in a short time, the new Church, powered by the Holy Spirit, was multiplying, and the life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ was spreading throughout the land.

God still calls His Church to be obedient. John 14:15 says, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments.* We prepare ourselves for the attacks from the rest of the world by understanding that God deserves our obedience, and He is our highest judge. When we face opposition and temptation, it is not a matter of convenience; it is a matter of obedience.

While their resolve to be obedient to God came with a price, it also came with a bonus of peace.

The apostles were obedient to God even though it would mean trouble for them. In the next few verses, we see that the High Priest arrested the Apostles and put them in prison. The apostles went quietly and respectfully. They did not resist arrest or even protest. This was not civil disobedience; it was supernatural obedience. While their resolve to be obedient to God came with a price, it also came with a bonus of peace.

The apostles were imprisoned in the public jail, but during the night, an Angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and led them out. There are several instances in the book of Acts where God used angels to care for His people. (Acts 8:26; 10:3; 12:7-11; 27:23) Surely the High Priest thought he had silenced the apostles, putting a stop to the signs and wonders getting so much attention. But as is often the case, in God’s economy, their attempt to stop the miracles set the stage for even more miracles. The locked prison doors were unlocked, yet what this Angel said was more important than what he did. The Angel’s words confirmed what the apostles had been doing and challenged them to continue without reservation.⁷

After freeing Peter and the apostles from prison, the Angel of the Lord instructed them to “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.” (Acts 5:20) Once again, driven by their desire to stand as we learned last week and to be obedient, they entered the temple and began to teach. Notice that the “L” in life is capitalized. This was not just about physical breathing; this was about the new life spiritually that comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. They were not to leave anything out; rather, they were to tell the “whole message.” The birthing of the Church was based not just on bits and pieces of God’s message that make us feel good or seem palatable, but on the entirety of God’s message that gives us new life, hope, and the courage to be obedient.

Remember, the Council was educated, ordained, and approved, yet they had no ministry of power. The apostles were ordinary laymen, yet God’s power was at work in their lives. The Council was trying desperately to protect themselves and their dead traditions, while the apostles were risking

⁶ *Life Application Bible Commentary-Acts*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, 1999, p. 81.

⁷ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1999, p. 66.

their lives to share the living Word of God. The dynamic Church was enjoying the new; the dead Council was defending the old.⁸ As we fill our hearts and minds with God's Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to mold us in this new life, we are left to obey God's call over every other thing regardless of the risks.

3. READY TO SPEAK

ACTS 5:27-28 *When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."*

When the Council sent for the apostles, they were not in prison. They found them standing in the temple, teaching the people. As the apostles taught openly in the name of Jesus, however, the High Priest would not even use His name. He referred to Jesus as "this man." (Acts 5:28) But even in this highly charged situation with the High Priest unwilling to utter His mighty name, the name of Jesus was being praised and lifted up!

When the High Priest asked him why he was teaching, after being forbidden to do so, Peter was ready to speak. We see his eloquent answer in Acts 5:29-32.

ACTS 5:29-32 *But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.³¹ He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.³² And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."*

Peter did not give the politically correct answer that might have made everyone happy. Peter spoke the truth and trusted God with the outcome. Not out of disrespect to the leaders, but in complete obedience to God. I have regretted the times I have **not** given a bold witness when God has opened a door. But I have never regretted boldly telling about Jesus! Paul says it well in Romans 1:16:

Peter spoke the truth and trusted God with the outcome.

ROMANS 1:16A *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*

Peter did not change the hearts of the High Priest or the religious Council that day. Neither was the faith of the apostles changed or even shaken. In fact, they spoke with power and were unashamed as they stood firmly for the Lord!

The angry Council wanted to kill Peter and the apostles, but God intervened. He used the unlikeliest of people to rescue them. One of the major teachers of the law was a Pharisee named Gamaliel, believed to have been a mentor to Saul before his conversion on the road to Damascus. Gamaliel spoke reason into the evil and accusing hearts of the Council:

ACTS 5:38-39 *So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.*

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, p. 340.

His logic in these verses quelled their anger; but, his neutrality revealed something about Gamaliel. He was a gifted teacher, revered, and trusted. But in this critical moment, he did not stand with Jesus. *He that is not with me is against me.* (Matthew 12:30)

The Council listened as we see in Acts 5:40, *They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.*

This was not simply a slap on the wrist; it was a true beating of their physical body. It would not have been unusual for this to be 39 lashes across a bare back in front of a crowd. It was intended to be cruel, humiliating, and painful. They stopped short of killing them, but they wanted the apostles to stop speaking about Jesus, so they flogged them as a penalty and warning.

For most of us, flogging would silence us. It would cause me to pause at the very least and reconsider speaking about Jesus in public and identifying with Him. Some people might have lowered their heads, gathered their clothes, and timidly attempted to leave the city in anonymity. That did not happen.

4. READY TO REJOICE

ACTS 5:41-42 *So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

But through the power of the Holy Spirit they stand, speak, obey and even rejoice in being persecuted for His name.

Reading these verses, you almost must do a double-take. They had just been jailed, publicly humiliated, flogged openly and told vehemently not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer. Yet verse 41 tells us they went on their way, *“rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”* Say again? *“Rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”* Peter had denied and cursed even knowing Jesus a matter of months ago. The disciples scattered in the darkness of the garden when Jesus was arrested. These were not naturally brave and confident men. Left to their own strength, they cower. But through the power of the Holy Spirit they stand, speak, obey and even rejoice in being persecuted for His name.

Perhaps while they were publicly being humiliated and flogged, they remembered the words of Jesus' first sermon, recorded in Matthew 5-7, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began with what we refer to as The Beatitudes section where He said,

MATTHEW 5:10-12 *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

They listened and learned from Jesus, and now they were applying those words in Jerusalem. Rejoicing was not the result of the humiliation, imprisonment, or flogging; instead, it was because they were considered worthy for the sake of Christ.

It is counter-intuitive to rejoice when someone persecutes, insults, or slanders you.

The apostles and the burgeoning Church had experienced the promise of Acts 1:8, *you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.* God was at work in the lives of the apostles. The Holy Spirit was empowering them to walk in the Spirit.

Remember, the Holy Spirit powers the Church. As believers, the Holy Spirit empowers us. We are not slaves to our natural man nor to sin. (Romans 6:6). Peter and the Apostles, ordinary men, rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Jesus! God wants the Church, made up of “ordinary people,” to be ready to rejoice should suffering come. When it does, God’s Word is clear, and we are called to rejoice.

Joy, which is the root word for rejoice, is the undeniable mark of the new life in Christ Jesus. Joy is also the identifiable evidence that Christ is alive in us, and we are facing reality with His guidance, intercessions, and undiminishable strength.⁹

They did not just rejoice and forget; they continued the mission for Christ.

ACTS 5:42 *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

This lifestyle continued every day, whether they were at the temple or in the neighborhood. They did not let the persecution slow them down, nor the threat of imprisonment silence them. They had the power that allowed them to be actively on mission for Christ. We have that same power today, yet are we on the same mission?

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

We tend to look at Peter, John, and the other disciples as superheroes as we put them on a pedestal. They were ordinary men who made a living doing ordinary jobs like fishermen, one was a tax man, others were so ordinary we do not even know their livelihood. They are not superheroes, but are empowered supernaturally.

Jesus fulfilled His promise recorded in Acts 1:8. The disciples received power through the Holy Spirit. There is confidence knowing we do not have to rely on our own strength or words. There is a peace that comes with knowing we are not alone in any setting or situation. There is an excitement that stirs from within when we walk by faith in the light of Christ.

God calls the Church to give hope, to obey, to be ready to speak, and to rejoice as we continue teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. As we hold unswervingly to God, we will find Him faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)

I recently heard an encouraging word in a podcast - **God will hold on to you more than you will ever hold on to Him!** In Acts 5, we see the apostles in the early Church holding tightly to God, knowing that He was holding them. This truth empowered them to continue the mission of Christ. This week may God’s plan for you shape your purpose of being on mission for the sake of Jesus Christ.

⁹ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts of the Holy Spirit*, Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1999, p. 74.