

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles

Week Six

Acts 5:12-42

Day One

12 The apostles performed many miraculous 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. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. 15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

v. 12 – Jesus continued to prove both His resurrection and His ongoing presence with the apostles by performing many miracles through them. And all the believers still met in the Temple area. This colonnade was built by Solomon on the east side of the outer court of the Temple and was left standing and repaired by Herod, who was king at the time of Jesus' birth. It was about 600 feet long, or the length of two American football fields, so it could accommodate large numbers of people. This colonnade or porch area had history going all the way back to Solomon! The early church saw themselves as an extension of the Davidic kingdom, although not in natural but spiritual terms. Therefore they met in this area, symbolic of their roots.

What are your spiritual roots? Do you know? Is there anything you can draw from them that can help you feel more rooted and connected today in your service to and worship of God?

v. 13 – Probably the death of Ananias and Sapphira still had people, especially the leaders and those with allegiance to the main groups of the day, wondering and shaking their heads at this new group of Jesus Jews. The Pharisees, Sadducees and high priests wanted nothing to do with the apostles. But the public held the early church in high regard, for they performed many miracles, were devoted to prayer and sold their possessions to fund one another's needs. There is no law against any of that activity! Someone once asked, **“If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” That's a good question. The early church members would have been found “guilty” as charged. Would you? What would the evidence be?**

v. 14 – Yet while none of the main groups of the day endorsed the Church, the public endorsed it by continuing to align with it. As was true in Jesus' ministry, the common people understood better than their leaders! Just become someone is a leader doesn't automatically make them smarter or more spiritual than their followers; they just have different gifts of leadership. **Do you agree with this? If so, are you intimidated by any leaders who you consider more spiritual than you?** This is an important question,

for if you do, you may counter what God is saying to you if that leader doesn't endorse it. Don't assume that you are automatically wrong and a leader right if you have differing views or opinions.

vs. 15&16 – The people flocked to the apostles because their physical and spiritual needs were met. People will go where they can get help. Someone once said the Church is to be a hospital for sinners and not a rest home for saints. **Do you agree with that statement? If so, what are you doing to reach the wounded who need “hospitalization”?** I would assume that this was happening in Solomon's Colonnade. How happy the Lord must have been that His Temple was being used to meet the needs of His people and not just as a place of high worship!

Day Two

17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 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."

v. 17 – As with Jesus, the leaders weren't rejoicing that the people's needs were being met. They were jealous that the people were going to the apostles and not to the high priests. Don't ever be jealous of someone else's success. For what do they have that God didn't give them? I was just recently told of someone who got a contract with a major book publisher to write a book about purpose. I know that this person has no history teaching about purpose and no passion for the subject. But I was happy to hear about his blessing! First, he is a good writer and he will help the purpose cause. Second, God has blessed him, so who am I to judge God? **How about you? Is jealousy affecting you in any area of your life?** John the Baptist had the proper perspective when it came to this issue:

They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan — the one you testified about — well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less (John 3:26-30).

v. 18 – Once again, Peter and John, along with some other apostles were put in jail for doing good deeds. This is how perverted justice is when jealousy rules and leaders don't uphold their duties as servants of the people and God. If you are a leader, whose interests are you representing—yours or the people whom you lead?

v. 19 – I love this scenario! The apostles were in jail and an angel came and got them out! This is so cool! That is the power of God to deliver you and me. So if you are in a tough place and you can't get it out, it may be because God wants you there. If He wanted you out, He could send angels and they could unlock the prison door.

v. 20 – But why were they delivered? To escape the city? To hide in the upper room? No, they were released so they could continue their mission. The high priests had told them not to preach; the angel released them and then commanded them to preach right in the Temple area. God liked what they were doing and wanted His Temple to be the focal point of their ministry for Him. The leaders forgot that it wasn't their Temple—it was God's. They had become God's caretakers instead of God's servants, which meant that they felt they had to protect God instead of promote Him.

Day Three

21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin — the full assembly of the elders of Israel — and sent to the jail for the apostles. 22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." 24 On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

v. 21 – The apostles obeyed the angel and set up a pulpit in the Temple area. The high priests arrived, assuming that they had safely contained this new threat in their jail, but God had other ideas. This time the priests convened the whole Sanhedrin, 70 members in all. They sent for their prisoners and expected to launch their investigation. But God isn't about business as usual for leaders who won't acknowledge Jesus.

vs. 22&23 – The guards came and gave their report that the prisoners weren't in the prison, even though the doors were securely locked. There were even guards outside the doors, but the apostles weren't there. Is this reminiscent of another scene? How about Jesus' tomb? There were guards and it was sealed, but Jesus "escaped." And now the apostles were also escaping from the prisons that Judaism was trying to contain them in. Isaiah wrote:

"See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work. And it is I who have created the destroyer to work havoc; no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD (Isaiah 54:16-17).

But when the Bible says that no weapon formed against you will prosper, that doesn't mean that weapons won't be brought against you; they will. But those weapons won't be successful against you. The apostles were thrown in jail, but the jail couldn't hold them.

You will go through trials, but they will not overwhelm you. Does that make sense? You must get this clear, otherwise you will be shaken when weapons come against you, thinking that you are doing something wrong or that God isn't fulfilling His promise. His promise is that they won't succeed, not that they won't come.

v. 24 – The guards and priests were puzzled, not knowing what to make of this. The mind that is set against God cannot comprehend the things of God. I have often said to people, “Don't expect Christian behavior from non-Christians. It's impossible!” Paul alluded to this when he wrote:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:5-8).

Is there anyone from whom you are expecting Christian behavior and they aren't Christians? If you can accept them for who and what they are, then perhaps you can more effectively minister to them.

Day Four

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. 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."

v. 25 – What a shock this must have been to the leaders. But instead of investigating how the apostles got out of jail, they simply seized them and started the investigation all over again. You would think that God would have gotten their attention that something was up, but they couldn't see it. They were blinded by their preconceived notions of what was really going on. That happens to all of us. More often than not, we need to suspend judgment so we can get to the truth. Instead we crystallize our judgment and can only see what we start out assuming is the truth. **Where do you need to relax your assumptions or conclusions in order to see something new?**

v. 26 – Even in this totalitarian environment, the guards had to respect the people and adjust their behavior. And once again, the people were more spiritually in tune than were their leaders, for they held the apostles in high regard while the priests wanted to stifle them.

v. 27 – Here were these apostles of the working class appearing before the highest officials in their culture. How intimidating this could have been. But they weren't

intimidated in the least. They were of course empowered by the Holy Spirit but they also had been with Jesus and had watched a man of untold courage and grace. They had been mentored and empowered, while the priests had only been mentored but had no power. Are you being mentored? And are you empowered to perform your purpose?

v. 28 – The priests showed their frustration, for they had ordered the apostles not to speak about Jesus and these priests were accustomed to having their orders obeyed. The apostles had disobeyed them and now were going to have to suffer the consequences. Remember the distinction I made in the last installment: the apostles submitted but they did not obey. They had to obey God, the higher authority, when the lower authority's dictates were contrary to God's.

If you have a boss or supervisor at work and he or she wants you to lie or steal, you cannot obey but you must submit. If you refuse to sin, they can fire you, and even try to soil your reputation. You may even have to resign. That is submitting to the consequences for obedience to God, consequences from an authority who has the power to make you suffer.

The priests did not want the guilt of Jesus' blood, but it was too late for that concern. They had condemned Jesus to death and stirred up the mob to make sure that Pilate was pressured into performing the act. Now they had deceived themselves into thinking that they weren't responsible and were trying to protect their reputation by confronting and punishing the apostles. If you are a leader, do you take responsibility for what you do, or do you shift the blame to others? Do you blame circumstances or face your own role in failure or problems? The Sanhedrin and priests provide a marvelous example of how leaders ought not to act. I trust that you will learn from their miserable example.

Day Five

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."

v. 29 – I am 54 years of age at this writing and I am still learning to walk in the truth of this statement: "I must obey God rather than men!" I always said I was doing this, but in truth I haven't always done it. In fact, there were many times that I allowed people to talk me out of God's will. No leader or person can answer to God for you, or hear from God on your behalf. You must hear for yourself and then obey what you hear. **Is there any area in your life right now where you are obeying men rather than God? Do you have any internal conflict over this issue? What are you prepared to do about it?**

v. 30 – The apostles let the leaders have it with "both barrels" of their spiritual shotgun. They told the leaders, in no uncertain terms, what they had done to Jesus and that God

raised Him from the dead. What courage! What Holy Spirit boldness! Do you have that kind of boldness? I know I don't. Lord, make me the person that You want me to be. Help me have the courage and love that I need to represent you well.

v. 31 – Luke reported that Peter and the other apostles said. Probably more than one man spoke, but perhaps one spoke and they were all in agreement. But they were there as a team, and I always say that all of us are smarter and more spiritual than any one of us. **Do you believe that? If you do, do you act it out or still believe as a leader (or follower) you can do it all or most of it on your own? What do you add to the team that you are on? Do you know what others add to that team? Do you rely on them to complement you?**

Notice here that Jesus was exalted to God's right hand and now "gives" repentance and forgiveness of sins. They are gifts and not something that we can earn. So there is no sense in being spiritually proud about what I have or know; they are simply gifts of God.

v. 32 – God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him and the Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth, as Jesus had said He would. You shouldn't feel that you must do it all when witnessing or testifying about Jesus. The Spirit is with you and can bear witness to someone while you are speaking. So relax, and trust in the Spirit's work, whether you are building a life or a church!

Day Six

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."

v. 33 – I have an essay entitled "Sinners in the Hand of An Angry Leader" which you can access at <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm>. In that essay, I make the point that authoritarian leaders get angry because they feel that they own what someone else is messing with. They consequently feel like they are being defrauded when a follower does something with which they don't agree. Here the priests were so furious that they wanted to kill the apostles, even though the apostles spoke the truth.

I've had to work on my anger problem over the years, especially when people didn't meet my expectations or do what I thought best for them to do. I have tried hard, with the Spirit's help, to apply the following verse:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (James 1:19-21).

Instead of doing what James wrote, I often do the opposite: I am quick to speak, quicker to anger and slower to hear. Someone said that this is why God gave us one mouth and two ears, so we can listen twice as much as we speak. **How are you doing on the anger issue? Do people upset you? Your children? Your spouse? Your followers? Your leaders? Why do think that you get so angry?**

v. 34 – This Gamaliel was Paul's tutor and mentor whom he mentioned in Acts 22:3. Gamaliel was a Pharisee and we see throughout Acts that the Pharisees took a gentler approach to the believers than did the Sadducees and priests. The Pharisees had no use for Paul, however, but did support Christian Jews because they both believed in the resurrection of the dead.

v. 35-37 – Gamaliel cautioned against taking out their thoughts of executing the apostles, reviewing some recent history that the priests and council could relate to. It is good to know history so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past. But at the same time, we cannot let history control us. **Are you learning from history or repeating history in your life, family or organization?**

vs. 38&39 – Gamaliel had lived long enough to realize that if God wasn't behind people or a so-called movement, it was doomed to fail. Yet, if God was the instigator, then no amount of opposition from man could defeat it. Therefore, he advised that the council not harm the apostles. That was wisdom! God used him at this point in history to keep the apostles alive. God does indeed rule in the affairs of men and in the hearts of rulers:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases (Proverbs 21:1).

I want to be an advisor like Gamaliel, using my experience to help the Lord and His people. Since I am a consultant to many churches at the present time, I pray for wisdom of what to say along with how and when to say it. **Do you pray for wisdom? Are you a stabilizing force wherever you are? Do people look to you for wisdom and insight?** Make that your life goal to prepare in such a way that you will be able to be used by God just as Gamaliel was used in this situation.

Day Seven

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.

v. 40 – Gamaliel had urged the council not to harm the apostles, so they called them back in and whipped them, like a father would whip his son when he misbehaved. I suppose they didn't consider whipping any "harm." The priests once again ordered the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus and sent them on their way. When any leader has a blind spot and doesn't see reality, all he or she can do is function in what they know. If what they know is wrong or incomplete, then they will make wrong decisions or repeat strategies that have failed in the past.

You can see once again that the apostles submitted to their whipping because the authorities had the power to whip them. But the authorities did not have the power to order them to cease and desist, so they disobeyed them.

v. 41 – This verse is so powerful. The apostles went away rejoicing! They were so happy that they had been counted worthy to suffer for Jesus that they were overcome with happiness. When you serve the Lord, your perspective isn't the same as the others around you. How do you view suffering and persecution for Jesus? James wrote:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:2-5).

Peter wrote:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name (1 Peter 4:12-17).

When Peter wrote the church to rejoice in suffering, he wasn't asking anyone to do anything he hadn't already done. He knew what he was talking about. Leaders shouldn't try to lead followers where they aren't willing to go themselves.

v. 42 – The apostles never stopped doing what Jesus had told them to do. That is a good model for you and me. **Are you doing what Jesus told you to do? What is that? Are you suffering for doing it?** If so, then rejoice and continue to do it.