

Rejoicing in persecution

1. Review
2. Observation and exposition of Acts 5:12-42
3. The take-away for us

Review

1. Briefly summarize the lesson from two weeks ago.

Observation and exposition of Acts 5:12-42

1. **Acts 5:12-42**
2. Signs and wonders, continued “success” (**5:12-16**)
 - a. A summary passage that transitions from the account of Ananias and Sapphira, and sets the context for what follows
 - b. Lots of pronouns in this paragraph ... Who was “all together in Solomon’s Portico?” [SLIDE]
 - c. Peter’s shadow
 - i. What happened when Peter’s shadow fell on them?
 - ii. Compare **Acts 19:11-12**
 - d. What was happening was so well known that people were coming from miles around (“the towns around Jerusalem”) to be healed.
 - i. But it wasn’t just the “people” who were aware of what was happening...
3. Jealousy and power-plays (**17-42**)
 - a. What the Jewish leaders (the Sanhedrin) did (**17-18**)
 - i. Arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison, or publicly put them in prison.
 - ii. Why did they do this?
 1. Jealousy
 - iii. What evidence was there that the apostles were acting for God?
 1. Signs and wonders
 - a. Healings
 - i. Specifically the man who was born lame in **Acts 3 and 4**, who had begged daily at the temple gate, and who was healed completely.
 - b. Unclean (evil) spirits cast out (**16**)
 2. The church had grown by multitudes (thousands)
 3. The story of Ananias and Sapphira

4. Jesus had been raised from the dead
 5. The day of Pentecost
 - a. Sound of a mighty rushing wind
 - b. What appeared to be tongues of fire on each of them
 - c. The apostles miraculously spoke and preached in other languages that they did not know
- iv. What “advantages” did the Sanhedrin have?
1. Descendants of Abraham
 2. The history of the nation of Israel
 3. The scriptures
 - a. The law
 - b. The prophets
 4. The temple
 5. ??
- v. With all this evidence and their advantages as Israelites why couldn't they see the truth?
1. **Luke 24:44-47** - even the apostles needed help to “see”
 2. **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**
 3. **Ephesians 2:4**
- b. What God did! **(19-21)**
- i. Sent an angel to free the apostles from prison **and** give them the message to keep teaching
 1. Angel or messenger?
 - a. Compare **Acts 12:6-11**
 2. The message?
 - a. Go to the temple (publicly, after they were just arrested!)
 - b. Speak to the people all the words of this Life
 - i. “Life” - a great descriptive term for the gospel
 - ii. And the apostles obeyed God, rather than the Jewish leaders
- c. The Sanhedrin meets to hold a trial, but the apostles are missing! **(21b-26)**
- i. Like Jesus, the apostles submit to the authorities without a fight, and go back to the council.
- d. A very brief trial
- i. The high priest's accusations **(27-28)**
 1. “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name”
 - a. He won't even say the name of Jesus.
 - b. The charge he refers to was back in **4:18** at their first trial.
 2. “you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching”
 - a. They realize how effective the apostles' teaching and preaching has been.

3. "you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."
 - a. Have they forgotten what happened at Jesus' trial before Pilate?
 - i. **Matthew 27:15-26**
- ii. Peter's reply (**29-32**)
 1. In response to the first charge
 - a. "We must obey God rather than men."
 - i. Rather than "you, the Sanhedrin, who told us not to teach in the name of Jesus."
 - ii. Doesn't mean that you simply disobey anyone other than God - Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:13-17** instructing Christians to obey the government.
 - iii. The principle here is that if it comes down to obeying contradicting orders (laws, rules, etc.), then we must choose to obey God.
 2. In response to the second charge
 - a. "The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree."
 - i. **Deuteronomy 21:22-23**
 1. Perhaps the worst possible death a Jew could experience, due to the curse.
 - ii. **Galatians 3:13**
 - iii. God raised Jesus back to life even though Jesus became a curse for us.
 - b. "God exalted him at his right hand as Leader (Prince) ..."
 - i. Not only did he raise him from the dead, God exalted Jesus to the highest place of honor in the universe.
 - c. "... and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."
 - i. The man who was cursed and killed by hanging on a tree is the only one who can give repentance and forgiveness of sins.
 - ii. Imagine how offensive this would be to the Sanhedrin and to their pride.
 - d. "And we are witnesses to these things ..."
 - i. Witnesses in the sense that they saw these things happen to Jesus, and they are speaking of these things to others.
 - e. "... and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."
 - i. The Holy Spirit is also a witness to what happened to Jesus.

- ii. Peter begins and ends his short speech speaking of obedience to God.
 - iii. He implies (?) that the Sanhedrin do not have the Holy Spirit, since they are obviously not obeying God.
- e. The response of most of the Sanhedrin **(33)**
 - i. Rage and murder - why? What did Peter say that made them so upset?
- f. The calm words of Gamaliel
 - i. What do we know about Gamaliel?
 1. A Pharisee
 2. Member of the council (Sanhedrin)
 3. A teacher of the law
 4. Respected by all the people
 5. The apostle Paul (Saul) was his student at one time **(22:3)** and in **23:6** claimed to be a Pharisee
 - ii. What do we know about Pharisees?
 1. "The name 'Pharisee' probably derives from the Aramaic verb 'divide, separate' (*peras*). The Pharisees saw themselves as 'the separated' or 'the holy ones', who kept aloof from those who were casual about keeping God's law. They were a continuation of the ancient Hasidim ('pious ones'), who joined the Hasmonean rulers in their struggle for religious freedom in the second century BC, when the Seleucids controlled Palestine. They withdrew their support, however, when the Hasmoneans went on to establish political as well as military supremacy for themselves and assumed the high priesthood. The Pharisees came from diverse backgrounds to devote themselves to the study of the law in its written and oral forms. They applied the law to every aspect of life and sought to prepare God's people for the coming of the Messianic Age by summoning them to live a holy life. In later Rabbinic tradition, Gamaliel appears as Hillel's successor in the headship of his school. He was so highly esteemed that the Mishnah declares: 'Since Rabban ['our teacher'] Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.'" Peterson, 224
 2. "In the first century A.D. they were reckoned to be some 6,000 strong, organized in closely knit 'companies' or 'associations'. They had great religious influence among the people; most of the scribes, [who were] the public expositors of the law, belonged to their party." Bruce, 115
 - iii. What Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin **(35-39)**

1. Be careful and think through what you are about to do, and here's why...
 2. He gives two examples of movements that failed in the past:
 - a. Theudas, who had about four hundred followers
 - i. "before these days," so earlier than the early 30s AD, and even before Judas the Galilean who was in AD 6.
 - ii. Josephus wrote (around AD 93) about a Theudas who sounds very similar to Luke's Theudas, but Josephus's Theudas appeared after Herod Agrippa's death in AD 44 (**Acts 12:20-23**)
 - iii. Who is correct? Luke or Josephus? Liberal commentators tend to favor Josephus. Why is this? And why can't both Luke and Josephus be right?
 1. "Much more probable is the suggestion that Gamaliel refers to another Theudas, who was one of many insurgent leaders who arose in Palestine at the time of Herod the Great's death in 4 BC and thus preceded the appearance of Judas the Galilean in AD 6." Peterson, 225
 - b. Judas the Galilean, after Theudas and during the days of the census
 - i. That census took place in AD 6 under the Roman legate (governor) Quirinius when Judea became a Roman province.
 3. His final advice? If, like Theudas and Judas, what the apostles are doing and teaching is of man and not of God, it will ultimately fail. But if it is of God, it will not fail, and the Sanhedrin will be opposing God himself.
 4. Sound advice, but even Gamaliel was ultimately blind to the truth and the evidence.
- g. The apostles are beaten (flogged?) and released, and they rejoiced in their suffering! (**39b-41**)
- i. Why were they beaten? Legally, for their contempt of court (**4:18**).
 - ii. See **1 Peter 4:13-14**, Peter lived out what he wrote about.
 - iii. The "blindness" of the Sanhedrin continues - they saw the apostles get beaten and rejoice because of the beating, and they still did not believe.
- h. Who did the apostles ultimately obey, even in the face of rising persecution? (**42**)
- i. They obeyed God, and kept on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ

The take-away for us

1. Prepare for persecution. It has never stopped happening throughout the history of the church, even though it doesn't happen yet (or much) here in America.

Resources

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III