

In the previous passage, we read of the jail break made possible by an angel of the Lord. Angel means messenger, and Jesus is the ultimate deliverer of the message of God. He is Himself the message in all that He did and said. The angel sent the apostles back into the temple to proclaim "all the words of this Life" (Acts 5:20). The Sanhedrin were shocked to find the jail cell empty, and even more shocked to find the apostles in the temple disobeying them again. Fearing the crowds, they politely asked them to come appear before the council (Acts 5:26). Peter bluntly told them that they had to obey God, regardless of the council's orders (Acts 5:29). We pick up with the last part of Peter's bold declaration.

*<sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.* Acts 5:30 This reminds me of Billy and Franklin Graham interviews. They always find some way, regardless of the question asked, to present clearly what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross. Peter declared it was the God of their fathers who raised Jesus, thus implying the Jesus movement is the fulfillment of Judaism. Peter believed historical Judaism was leading to Jesus. He gave credit for Jesus' resurrection to the very God the council claimed to worship!

How appropriate that we would come to this line during Passion week. This verse is the summary of the Easter message. As I worked on the last sermon, I felt like I ended it without concluding the thought in the text. It seemed strange to end there, but that is just how it happened. I wasn't even thinking of the season, as I prepared it the 24<sup>th</sup> of March. When I began preparing the message for today I realized the sovereignty of God had me end before this verse. I'm a little slow at comprehending what God is doing and why. The resurrection is central to the gospel message. Jesus conquered death. It was the ultimate sign that His message was true and His sacrifice was accepted by God (Romans 4:25).

**We should note that the response of the leaders wasn't to refute the resurrection.** The vast majority of scholars believe the grave was empty and that the Jewish leadership knew it. There was no evidence to refute the claim that Jesus had risen. I believe they had no doubt that Jesus had risen, since they had to pay off the guards to lie and say the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:12-13). If they believed the disciples stole the body, you can be sure they would have done everything they could to find the it. There is no account of the rulers or of Rome searching for Jesus' body.

Peter boldly declared that the council was guilty of having killed Jesus by crucifixion. They had just complained that the apostles were trying to "bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28). Peter didn't flinch. He said they were guilty. But we are all guilty, for Jesus willingly went to the cross for our sins. We should consider how courageous this was. Crucifixion was one of the most effective ways to make a person experience extended suffering and humiliation. Peter cowered before when facing this threat (Matthew 26:74), but now He is as bold as a lion. He is filled with the Holy Spirit.

*31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.* Acts 5:31 Jesus made the claim that He was about to be exalted to the right hand of God before this same body of rulers (Matthew 26:64). It was a reference to a Messianic Psalm (Psalm 110:1). That infuriated the leaders. To be at God's right hand meant He is Sovereign, not only of Israel, but over all creation. These leaders claimed to be executing Jesus for blasphemy, putting Him under a curse by having Him "hung on a tree," but Peter is saying that Jesus is the Leader now, and they are the blasphemers, for God exalted Jesus, the Savior, and offers repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Well, now that must have really done it. The priests were there with the ruling council, and it was their job to help the people with sacrifices that were to cover their sins (Leviticus 16:16). Peter is saying they aren't needed anymore either. The Lamb of God had come. Just the very declaration that they needed to repent would have made these leaders and priests angry. Peter's sentiment was held by the Essenes who saw the whole temple system as being corrupt and no longer valid. Peter couldn't have made more damning claims. It was all true and inspired by the Holy Spirit, and perhaps it was more for the crowd that was looking on rather than the ears of these hard-hearted leaders and priests.

*32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.* Acts 5:32 Peter is doing what Jesus asked Him to do, to testify of the resurrection of Jesus and all the words of this Life (Acts 1:8; 5:20). And that is what we should do when we are given the opportunity. Have you witnessed what God has done in your life and the life of others? Has God given you the Holy Spirit? Then we should be sharing that with others at every opportunity God gives us. I'm not saying to force it on everyone you meet, but to watch for the God given appointments when you know the Holy Spirit is prompting you to share. Pray for opportunities and then watch for God to answer that prayer by speaking through you to their hearts.

We should also note that Peter said God has given the Holy Spirit to those who *obey Him*. We begin obeying by repenting and accepting Him as our Lord and Savior. We continue by reading the Word, having fellowship, and learning to hear the voice of the Spirit in prayer. Then we obey what we hear and the power of the Spirit does the work through us (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

*33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.* Acts 5:33 Why are they so enraged? A quick review shows us Peter claimed the rulers didn't represent God so he wasn't going to obey them. He accused them of instigating Jesus' death. He declared Jesus is sovereign over all and now offers them repentance and forgiveness. They would know this if they had the Holy Spirit, but they don't because they disobey God! Now do you see why they are enraged? They should have been on their faces asking God to forgive them because they knew Jesus rose from death. But they are too hard-hearted to even consider repenting. They want Peter and all the apostles dead!

*<sup>34</sup> But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.* Acts 5:34 While the Sadducees were in the majority, there were also many Pharisees on the council. They were respected for their piety. They meticulously tried to keep the written and oral laws. Gamaliel was the leading Pharisee and well respected by all.<sup>4</sup> Other sources than the Bible indicate that he was one of the most esteemed of all the Pharisees. He asked that the apostles be put out of earshot while they had a private conversation. The temple guards would have taken them away and pushed back the crowds so the seventy could discuss the matter in private.

*<sup>35</sup> And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. <sup>36</sup> For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.* Acts 5:35-36 Gamaliel is using examples of messianic pretenders who were dealt with by Rome. While these false messiahs were military leaders revolting against Rome and sometimes against the temple hierarchy, the Jesus' movement was non-violent and participated in temple practices (Acts 20:21-23). Verbal disputes about what was right and what the Law really taught were an expected part of Jewish culture, so the Jesus group would have not been so unusual in that regard.

Gamaliel was comparing two unlike things, but the point he is making is valid. God is sovereign, and He will see that the movement ends if it is not of God (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). *Pharisees believed that all things were in the hand of God and yet that man was responsible for his actions. "Everything is foreseen," they said, "yet freedom of choice is given."*<sup>1</sup>

*<sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.* Acts 5:37 We have no record of Theudas or his revolt, but we know something of the revolt of Judas. *He had rebelled at the time of the census, taken by the governor Quirinius in A.D. 6 in order to arrange taxation. Judas took up the position that God was the King of Israel; to him alone tribute was due, all other taxation was impious and to pay it was a blasphemy. He attempted to raise a revolution but failed.*<sup>2</sup>

*<sup>38</sup> So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice,* Acts 5:38-39 Some people see Gamaliel as a hero and defender of the early church. I have a different opinion. I think he was a very wise man who could see that executing the apostles would cause a revolt which would be crushed by Rome and end the freedoms that the Jews had at the time. He applied the Pharisee perspective with historical examples, in my opinion, to pull the council back from a destructive decision. If the people and the leading Pharisee were opposed to the council's decision to

execute the apostles, it was not going to turn out well, and so, the council reluctantly had no choice but to take his advice. I say that because Gamaliel is the rabbi<sup>3</sup> who disciplined Saul, who later became Paul the apostle. Disciples strive to be like their rabbi. Just a year or two after our passage, when the public was turning on Jesus' followers, Saul led the efforts to imprison and kill Christians with consent of the ruling council (Acts 9:1-2).

*<sup>40</sup> and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.* Acts 5:40 This beating was probably the 39 lashes prescribed by the Law (Deuteronomy 25:3; 2 Corinthians 11:24). The whips were triple strips of calf hide. The victim had arms stretched out and hands tied to a pole on each side and was made to kneel. For every two lashes of the back, the third would be across the chest to be sure to end on the 39<sup>th</sup> lashing as the Law prescribed. It would result in the flesh tearing apart before the beating ended. One by one the apostles endured this humiliation and pain.

I don't think a single one of them asked Peter why He was so bold in addressing the council. They all knew the Holy Spirit had spoken through Him. This was the council's attempt at intimidation, telling the apostles they might not be able to execute them, but they would make them suffer if they kept speaking in the name of Jesus.

*<sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.* Acts 5:41 All of them left presence of the council rejoicing. Can you see them, chests and backs bleeding, but smiles of joy on their heavenward faces and words of praise coming from their lips? What an odd sight. That was a sure sign this conflict was not over, but had only just begun. Their Savior had suffered and been dishonored for them, and now they were given the privilege of suffering and being dishonored for His name and obedience to Him. The Apostle Paul would later write Timothy, "If we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

With intimidation like that, they decided they would only speak when it was necessary and went underground. NO, that is not what happened! *<sup>42</sup> And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.* Acts 5:42 They didn't avoid the temple because of the threats. They kept going every day and kept teaching and preaching there and from house to house. We share Jesus not only in our worship gatherings but in homes as well. They didn't separate their religious life from their daily life. These must have been somewhat like our small groups. The apostles must have divided up and gone to various house gatherings to further instruct the new believers.

Their message was that Jesus is the Messiah. That is what the title "Christ" means. They taught and preached that Jesus was the One the prophets had predicted (John 1:45). They would have shown people how the Suffering Servant Songs of Isaiah pointed to Jesus (Isaiah 53:6), as well as the Messianic Psalms (Psalm 22:16-18;

16:10). They would have referred to the Law and showed them the promise of One who would deliver us from the power of Satan and remove the curse that came when Adam and Eve fell (Genesis 3:15). They showed how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to bless the world through his seed (Genesis 12:3), and how Jesus is the One like Moses who delivers us from the bondage of sin and leads us to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 18:15).

What are we to learn from this passage? What is the take away for us? Certainly, we too should be unafraid to speak the words the Spirit puts in our mouths. We should do as Jesus commanded and have no fear of those who can kill the body but rather fear Him who can cast both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28). And we should look for every opportunity to speak all the words of this Life.

I'm convicted by the apostles' joy after they suffered. I suffer a little bit, nothing like they did, and I whine to the Lord. If we suffer for obeying the Holy Spirit we should rejoice. Jesus said so. It puts us in sacred company (Matthew 5:11-12). If we are inconvenienced because there is an opportunity to serve the body of Christ, we should have the same joy the apostles had when they left that council bleeding and in pain. We should remember that it is those who obey who are filled with the Spirit.

Today is the Sunday we remember the Triumphal Entry. Many in that crowd that praised Jesus a few days later would cry out for Him to be crucified. That fact challenges to look into our hearts and ask ourselves if we are fair weather Christians who follow along with the crowd, or if we are like these disciples, willing to suffer shame and physical abuse for His name. It all comes back to our personal relationship with Jesus. If we live in Him daily, putting out life in His hands, He will give us the strength to endure with joy whatever may come.

## Questions

- 1 What led up to our text?
- 2 Why didn't the council refute the resurrection?
- 3 Why is there a change in Peter?
- 4 What claim of Jesus did Peter repeat?
- 5 Who is filled with the Spirit?
- 6 List Peter's accusations of the council.
- 7 What was Gamaliel's counsel?
- 8 How were they beaten?
- 9 Why would they be joyful?
- 10 How should we apply the passage?