

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 5: PREACHING IN JERUSALEM, PART 3 (ACTS 5:12-6:7)

Peter and John had stood before and been threatened by the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish council). However, they refused to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. They sought boldness from God, and the gospel continued spreading in Jerusalem.

THE NUMBER OF BELIEVERS INCREASES (ACTS 5:12-16)

5:12-16. God continued working miracles through the apostles' hands (answering their prayer, Acts 4:29-30, and confirming the word they spoke, Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:1-4). The apostles and, evidently, other believers continued meeting in Solomon's Colonnade in the temple (Acts 2:46; 3:11), but some (perhaps those who were not fully convinced) did not dare join them (perhaps fearing their hypocrisy would be exposed like Ananias and Sapphira's, Acts 5:1-11). Yet, the unbelievers spoke well of them. Those who became true believers in Jesus were added to the Lord (Acts 2:37-41, 47; Galatians 3:26-27) in increasing numbers – multitudes of men and women! People would bring the sick into the streets on cots and mats so that Peter's shadow might even fall on them (Matthew 9:20-22; 14:36; Acts 19:11-12). A multitude even came from surrounding towns to bring the sick and demon-possessed, and they were all healed.

THE APOSTLES ON TRIAL (ACTS 5:17-42)

5:17-24. As more Jews were coming to faith in Christ through the preaching of the apostles, the high priest (likely Caiaphas) and the Sadducees were filled with jealousy and had the apostles arrested and put into the public jail. Yet, God used an angel to open the doors of the prison during the night and release them (perhaps similar to Acts 12:6-10). The angel told the apostles to go stand in the temple and tell the people the complete message about this Life (Jesus Christ, John 6:68; 14:6). Rather than hiding, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Meanwhile, the high priest, his associates, and the full Sanhedrin convened, intending to silence the apostles. But, when the orders were sent to have the apostles brought from the jail and stand before them, news was reported that the jail was secure and guarded, but no one was inside! The captain of the temple police and the chief priests were baffled and wondered what

would come from these events (perhaps how others may respond).

5:25-32. As the council and the captain of police were perplexed, someone reported that the apostles were in the temple teaching the people! Rather than the apostles hiding in fear, it was the commander and officers who went to bring the apostles in without force (contrast with Acts 21:30-36) because they were afraid the people might stone them for arresting the apostles. The apostles went with them and stood before the Sanhedrin (which had condemned Jesus to death previously, Luke 22:66-23:2). The high priest questioned them by saying they had been strictly ordered not to teach in Jesus's name (Acts 4:17-18), yet he said they had filled Jerusalem with their teaching (i.e. about Jesus) and concluded they were determined to make them guilty of Jesus's blood (Matthew 27:20-26). Rather than cowering, Peter and the apostles boldly replied that they must obey God rather than people (a principle that stands true for any human authority)! Therefore, they would preach even if it meant defying the Sanhedrin. The defense given by Peter is both simple and powerful. The God of their ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after they had murdered Him by hanging Him on a tree (as one accursed from God, Deuteronomy 21:22-23). God had exalted this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, to His right hand as Ruler (Leader, Prince, King) and Savior. Through Him, God gave both the motivation and opportunity to Israel to repent and be forgiven of their sins (Acts 2:37-41). The apostles were witnesses of these things they were speaking about, and so was the Holy Spirit (who was testifying of Jesus through the words being preached and confirming such through the miracles being done, John 15:26-27). The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles who obeyed Him, and would be given to others who obey God (Galatians 4:6; though not all would receive the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Acts 8:14-19; 19:5-6).

5:33-42. The members of the Sanhedrin were furious and wanted to kill the apostles. However, a respected teacher (one of the most respected teachers in Jewish history), member of the Sanhedrin, and Pharisee (strictest of the Jewish sects) named Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) stood up and ordered the apostles to be taken outside. Then, he urged the Sanhedrin to be careful about what they would do to the apostles, stay away from them, and leave them alone. He suggested that if the work these men were doing was not from God, it would fail (appealing to the examples of Theudas and a Galilean named Judas, who each attracted followings that eventually failed). However, if their work was from

God (though evidently not believing it was himself), they would not be able to stop them and would be guilty of fighting against God. He persuaded the Sanhedrin, though they still flogged (a severe beating) them and ordered them not to speak in Jesus's name anymore, and then released them. Despite this, the apostles rejoiced in suffering shame for the name of Jesus (Matthew 5:10-12; 10:16-39; Luke 21:12-19; John 15:18-21) and spent every day continuing to teach and proclaim the good news that Jesus is the Messiah in the temple and various homes (Acts 20:20)!

SEVEN CHOSEN TO SERVE (ACTS 6:1-7)

6:1-7. The number of disciples was continuing to increase. Now, an internal complaint developed in the church between the disciples (all of whom were either Jews or Gentiles who had converted to Judaism). The Hellenistic Jews (Greek-speaking, likely from outside Palestine) complained against the Hebraic Jews (Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking, likely from Palestine) that their widows were being neglected/overlooked in the daily service (i.e. necessary provisions). As the apostles became aware of the complaint, they determined it would not be right for them to spend their time taking care of this issue and stop preaching God's word. Instead, they gathered the disciples and urged the church to select seven men who could be appointed to take care of this work. Those selected were to have good reputations and be full of the Spirit and wisdom (lives dominated by the Spirit's influence, Galatians 5:16-26; perhaps involving miraculous spiritual gifts, Acts 8:14-17). The church was pleased at this proposal and chose seven men: Stephen (full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Acts 6:8, 10), Philip (Acts 8), Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus (a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch). These men stood before the apostles, and the apostles prayed and laid hands on them (evidently endorsing/commending these men to the work, Acts 13:1-3). The result was that the word of God continued to spread, greatly increasing the number of Jesus's disciples in Jerusalem. Even a large group of priests became obedient to the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27; Jude 1:3)!

CONCLUSION

The disciples of Christ had now faced opposition from several fronts (e.g. Jewish leadership, physical need, hypocrisy in the church, and complaints in the church). Yet, the gospel continued to spread. The church was continuing to grow in Jerusalem!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What was God doing through the apostles?

What did the Jewish leaders do to the apostles as the gospel's message was spreading?

What did the apostles do when they were released from prison?

What did the Jewish leaders not like about the gospel's message?

How did the apostles respond when they were questioned by the Sanhedrin?

What advice did Gamaliel give the Sanhedrin concerning the apostles?

How did the apostles respond after being released by the Sanhedrin?

What complaints were made among widows in the church, and how did the church respond?