
Swimming Upstream

Acts 5:17-42

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” 21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25 And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” 26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 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. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. 36 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. 37 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. 38 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; 39 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, 40 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. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Sermon Outline:

I. Cowardice v. Courage (Acts 5:17-24)

- A. Intimidating People & Circumstances
- B. Changed People & Circumstances
- C. Because our King is on the throne, we have superior:

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- 1) Cosmology
 - 2) Insight
 - 3) Words

II. Man's Word v. God's Word (Acts 5:35-32)

- A. Only Empty Words
- B. Only Word
- C. Three things God's Word does:
 - 1) Strengthens our resolve
 - 2) Exposes motives
 - 3) Drives people to repentance

III. Disgrace v. Joy (Acts 5:33-42)

- A. Passive
- B. Active
- C. Three things suffering does:
 - 1) Proves our faith is genuine
 - 2) Brings honor to those who suffer in the name of Jesus
 - 3) Increases our love for Jesus

Discussion Questions

1. How do our desires for security, acceptance, and success cause us to be intimidated by particular people and/or circumstances?
2. What was the explanation for the apostles' courage in this passage? (Hint: look back at Acts 4:29-31)
3. Courage was defined as *choosing to believe God's promises*. What are some promises in Scripture you can choose to believe when being tested?
4. Because Jesus is on the throne, we have a superior cosmology, superior insight, and superior words. How do we have these? Discuss what this means for us as Christians.
5. Discuss the three things God's Word does. How does this enable us to speak God's Word when we face opposition?

Going Deeper

1. What particular people or circumstances do you face that require courage to stand for Christ and what is right? What promises can you claim? How can you use God's Word to overcome man's words?
2. Reflect on this poem which was read:

Hast Thou No Scar

by Amy Carmichael

Hast thou no scar?
 No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
 I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,
 I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,
 Hast thou no scar?
 Hast thou no wound?
 Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent.
 Leaned me against the tree to die, and rent
 By ravening beasts that compassed me, I swooned:
 Hast thou no wound?
 No wound? No scar?
 Yet as the Master shall the servant be,
 And pierced are the feet that follow Me;
 But thine are whole. Can he have followed far
 Who has no wound nor scar?

We know from Acts and the rest of Scripture that to be a Christian means you will face suffering/testing. How does God turn our disgrace into joy? Or to ask another way, how will an eternal perspective help us keep our present sufferings in proper perspective?