

Persecution Begins **Acts 5:17-32**

Welcome to narrative literature. One of the things you will encounter in the book of Acts is stories. Long stories. The New Testament letters contain short yet powerful commands, promises and exhortations in many places. The Book of Acts is largely a collection of stories and in Acts 5, we've got a good one.

To keep things straight, here are the major players in this story:

Sadducees – Jewish religious leaders. They were very narrow in their religious views. Accepted only the first 5 books of the Bible. Did not believe in any kind of resurrection.

Sanhedrin – Jewish religious supreme court. They declared Jesus guilty of blasphemy.

High Priest – In charge of everything religious including the Sanhedrin.

Temple Police – These are not Roman soldiers, they are Jews. They are not as much of a fighting machine as the Roman soldier but they do have weapons and will use them.

The seeds of persecution in this passage are jealousy and hostility. Note that in the interrogation, the merit of the apostles' position is never discussed. They don't say anything about Jesus being a false Messiah. They don't accuse the apostles of faking the resurrection of Jesus. They don't suggest that the Scriptures don't fit a man like Jesus. They just say to stop talking about Jesus.

This is emotion. Jealousy. This jealousy will lead to hostility which will lead to deadly persecution.

The new action taken by the High Priest is to arrest ALL of the apostles and put them in public jail. An angel of the Lord secures their escape.

If this had only been about *securing their freedom*, the angel of the Lord would have given them a different mandate. Look at what they are told by the angel:

Go and stand in the temple complex and tell the people all about this life.

If the people are not told, they will never know.

The teaching of the Apostles and Peter contains some recurring themes:

Jesus was crucified.

God raised Jesus from the dead.

God has exalted Jesus as Savior.

Jesus has the authority to grant repentance and forgiveness of sins.

The early Church was willing to pay dearly for this simple message which focused on Jesus. The religious leadership rejects this message much like they rejected Jesus Himself. The break between Judaism and Christianity began at the cross. This break is solidified with this interrogation. The leaders have no intention of listening to the claims of Christianity. They just want it to go away.

Peter's response:

We must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29

Home Group Discussion Questions:

- 1) For those of you who don't meet every week: Who are you praying for to become a Christian?
- 2) Have you ever faced any type of hostility or strong adverse reaction from others as a response to your Christian faith? (Not just general disrespect toward Christianity but a reaction toward you.)
- 3) Since we Christians might receive pushback or even hostility for our faith, discuss in your group the key components of the gospel. What is the most offensive piece of the gospel?
- 4) Why do you think Peter was able to say, "We must obey God rather than men" to the very same people who sentenced Jesus to death? Where do you think that courage and conviction came from?
- 5) Does this passage of Scripture challenge the notion that Christians are to witness with their lifestyle as in witness primarily with their lifestyle? Do we see the apostles relying on a lifestyle witness? How do we know we are achieving balance between witness with words and lifestyle?
- 6) Discuss in your group the possibility of this encounter being played out very differently. Suppose Peter and the apostles back down. How would that affect the rest of the New Testament?

Family Discipleship:

Read Acts 5:17-32 as a family and discuss the questions below.

The apostles got in trouble for talking about Jesus and sharing the gospel.

What is the gospel?

Who can we talk to about Jesus? What can we say?

What do we do when people don't agree with us about Jesus?

It is our responsibility to talk about Jesus to people and the Holy Spirit's responsibility to change their hearts.