

Acts, Sermon #13

Acts

Standing on the brink of the birth of the church, Jesus said, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me the world over.

But since the start of the Church, the church has received opposition – from inside and outside the church.

In Acts 5, we have the second persecution of the church

I’ve entitled today’s message: **“To Obey God or Man?”**

Acts 5:17

Let us stand for the reading of God’s Holy Word.

Acts 5:17 -32

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

“To Obey God or Man?”

This passage is more than just the history of church persecution.

This passage has been meaningful to God's people down thru the centuries. Many of God's people have drawn courage to obey God in the face of terrible persecution from this passage.

This passage is intended to increase our faith.

There are times all of us are put in an uncomfortable position or we are forced to take an unpopular stand. Sometimes in our families, or at work, at school, with our peers. It may cost us our employment, but usually not imprisonment. It may cost us a deriding scowl or harsh words but not loss of life or separation from our family.

We live in a country that has given to its people for over 200 years, religious freedom.

We are able to give gospel tracts, give verbal testimonies of Jesus Christ. We can own our own properties. Our offering to the Lord is without taxation. The freedoms of our religion are unheard of!

The unusual thing is the length of time that we have enjoyed this. We take it for granted.

But most of God's people throughout history have had to pay a high price because they lived in a place where to obey God came with a price tag.

Persecution can come from all kinds of sources. In vs. 17, it was from the religious sector. In India, it is the Hindu's not the government that is persecuting Christians.

In the book of Acts, the Roman government plays no major role in the persecution of Christians in the early years.

Beginning in A.D. 60, from that point on, starting with the reign of Nero, the Christians became persecuted for the next 250 years without stop.

We are not talking about a restriction of liberties but about the taking of their lives, confiscation of their properties and the burning of their Bibles.

Persecution has continued right up to our day. We live in such a bubble here in the West that our personal sacrifice for Christianity is small and getting smaller.

Just a month ago I was with Chinese men and women arrested for sharing Christ. I was with a man whose father had to flee China to survive. I was with men whose grandparents were starved to death for their faith and whose peoples today are sent to work camps, 20 years for their Christian faith.

Earlier this Spring I talked to a pastor who is a cripple and as a cripple, he had been beaten twice in India in the last 2 years.

Yet we live in a country with extraordinary freedom. How many gospel tracts do we give? How many people do we tell about Jesus Christ? What are the reasons we don't? Often times, it is, we don't think to do it or we are afraid.

The beliefs that we hold have become more perpendicular to our country. Our beliefs are becoming more and more foreign and agitating to our country.

What we believe on homosexuality.

What we believe on capital punishment.

What we believe on corporal punishment.

What we believe on heaven and hell.

What we believe on salvation, that it is exclusive to Christ.

Vs. 28 is the heart of the passage.

The first words out of their mouth are these, vs. 28a – to cease, to stop; to desist

Peter's response, vs. 29

The last verse of this chapter clearly shows us the reality of the believers, vs. 42

God uses an angel, Peter, and a Pharisee to teach us whether we should obey God or man!

Vs. 17-18, record the imprisonment. This is always a vulnerable time for the people of God.

These apostles are in a circumstance that often times make us rethink our position.

When we are under pressure, we begin to count the cost and we find out if we are going to hold to the Word of God or not!

God is going to help (encourage) the apostles. He sends an angel in vs. 19. The angel releases them from prison without anyone knowing. The angel opens and shuts the gates. That is a miracle.

Then the apostles receive a charge from the Lord – vs. 20. Go, Stand and Speak.

Challenge people to **Go, Stand, Speak** – 6 people

The apostles are in their Jerusalem and so are we.

Vs. 21 – Obedience - they “heard,” and they “entered”, vs. 21.

If we believe that Jesus said, “Be witnesses unto me,” then let us obey

If we believe that we ought to go to Jerusalem, then let us go.

We need to abandon concern for our self.

We must die to self

He commands them to go back to the very place where they were taken prisoners.

They were to go to a public place and teach the people.

The angel gave them the time – right away. The direction was, get after it – get back to Acts 1:8 living.

In another part of Israel, the Sanhedrin are assembling, vs. 21.

The Sanhedrin or Council was a group of seventy men plus the high priest.

- Vs. 21, another word, “senate,” meaning the elder leaders.

Then someone is told to go and bring the apostles from the prison. When they arrive at the prison, they find the keepers, the jail fully locked down and yet empty cells.

They quickly returned and said we found everything as it should be; everything shut up with the guards posted. Yet when we opened the doors, no one was there.

Then there was confusion from the Sanhedrin and it was at that moment, that God brought the informer in, vs. 25-28. Acts 4:18

As a local church, we are to saturate our area with the gospel and the truth of God’s Word. We have not done that.

Was it the apostles’ intent to bring the blood of the Jews upon them? Yes

Remember at the crucifixion – when Pontius Pilate washed his hands of this whole mess and the people said, “His blood be on us and our children” (Matt. 27: 25).

First the angel, now Peter speaks

Vs. 29 gives us the principle, that it is right to obey God when the demands of men contradict God.

We must clarify the principle that it is absolutely essential that what we are doing is demanded by God.

Daniel for example:

Name change – he did not object

Godless education – he did not object

But the King's food – he objected because it would defile him

The King's food would have violated a direct command of God?

Vs. 30, Peter says, you slew and hung Jesus on a tree but God raised Him up..

God's purpose of the resurrection was to bring Israel to repentance and salvation,
vs. 31.

God wants His enemies to come over.

Because of the boldness of Peter – “you slew and hanged Jesus on the tree”

This preaching cut to the heart, vs. 33. We like to say it stepped on our toes.

Go, Stand and Speak – first the angel, then Peter and now

III. One of their own – a Pharisee, a doctor of the law – vs. 34.

Gamaliel was the teacher of Saul/Paul, (22:3).

Vs. 35

Gamaliel gives two cases.

Vs. 36

Vs. 37

Gamaliel recounted some history of false religious leaders whose work came to nought.

Then in vs. 38, he says, I counsel thee to be restrained and let them alone. Is vs. 39 a correct statement?

Whatever is of God will eventually succeed.

The counsel agreed, vs. 40. But they did not let them go without a beating. They were all beaten down, all bloodied.

The usual beating consisted of forty stripes, lessened by one to avoid accidentally exceeding the law. This was the first physical suffering experienced by the Christians. Neither trouble within or trouble without could stop the work which God had started.

What does it take to frustrate us from the commands of Christ?

The scripture goes on to tell us of their attitudes in vs. 41, and their emotion was what?

That is incredible, that is supernatural. Christianly rejoices!

Would we be encouraged or discouraged if we had to pay for our beliefs? The least bit of criticism, discomfort and the belly aching begins.

Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you and great is your reward in heaven.

Vs. 41, they were counted worthy!

Could it be that the reason we are not persecuted is because we are not obedient to Go, Stand and Speak?

We are unfaithful, we have been pampered, a self indulgent generation of Christians that we avoid any criticisms, any opportunities to speak. Instead of being bold we cower.

Heb. 11:33-35 – un-named faithful people – some people

Vs. 35, and others just as faithful, just as much in the center of God's will

Vs. 35, they are tortured

Vs. 36-37

I Peter 4:12-16

The early church often had to meet to discuss major topics.

Council of Nicea – A.D. 325 – 318 men – only 11 of the men were free from marks on his body.

Many of the delegates were without eyes, ears, teeth, fingers, toes, hands, and with broken and twisted limbs. Many of the ones were maimed, mutilated and crippled in their bodies for what they endured for Christ.

Though that may happen, it is still right, it is still right to obey God rather than man.

If we face persecution, we know where to go, Acts 5.

Vs. 42 – is that our attitude, our determination?

Vs. 42 – Let that be said of us and our church

Let us stand for closing invitation. Every eye closed

Gospel

God by His Spirit has called everyone of us to "Go" and win the world.

The scriptures are clear.

1. It is right to obey God.
2. We do not choose the consequences of men for our obedience to God.
3. If God wants us out of prison, He will get us out.
4. If God wants us to stay in prison, He wants us there.

All the apostles suffered persecution and all died except one as a martyr for the cause of Christ.

Let us not be afraid to lose our jobs, to be overlooked for a promotion, to be spoken against, to be falsely accused.

Go, Stand and Speak – 6 people, one for each day

To Obey God or Man?