

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread (~444 words [~8%])

Blue – Explanation/Exposition (~2732 words [~47%])

Red – Application (~1109 words [~19%])

Green – Illustration (~286 words [~5%])

Brown – Quotation (~186 words [~3%])

Black – Scriptures and Notes (~956 words [~17%])

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Never Surrender

Acts 5:17–42

Let's turn once again to the book of Acts, Acts 5:17–42. Previously we saw the cautionary tale that was Ananias and Sapphira. In that passage of Scripture we saw punishment, purifying, and power. We saw God *punish* sinful hypocrisy in the church. That punishment was a warning meant to *purify* the church. And after that we saw an incredible outpouring of God's *power*. Miracles continued in the early church. People got saved. The gospel was preached. Peter's shadow was healing people. These were wonderful, powerful acts of God. And God's favor was poured out on the church after the debacle of Ananias and Sapphira.

And here's the question I want to ask as we approach today's passage: "Does an outpouring of God's power mean that we are safeguarded against persecution and opposition?" Let me ask it this way: "Does God's favor in the church or in our lives eliminate the possibility of pain and suffering?" Does it?

I think that most American Christians would answer that question correctly by saying "No. No it doesn't." But often we live our lives in such a way where we unconsciously believe that if I'm obeying God and serving him faithfully, then life is going to be easy street. God is going to accommodate my faithfulness with ease and comfort and answered prayers and endless blessings.

But then we get blindsided by a bout of depression. Or we get attacked at work because of our faith. Or we get marginalized by our family for our convictions. Or we start to experience conflict with our parents, our siblings, or our kids. And then we turn to the Lord and say, "What gives? Why are you letting this happen to me, Lord?" And we let hardships derail our faithfulness to God.

Why does that happen? Why are we like that in America? Well, I'll tell you why... but you're not going to like it. We are like that in America, because we are soft. And I'm including myself in that estimation. I'm an American, and I'm guilty as charged. We're soft. We like our soft, cushy, comfortable, lifestyles, uncomplicated by suffering or human opposition.

And that's why we don't evangelize. That's why we don't radically serve Christ in the face of opposition. That's why we try to blend in with everyone else, even when blending in means compromise. And that's why we surrender to the pressures of this world.

The title for the message today is "Never Surrender." And my prayer today is that God would give us the kind of "never surrender" attitude that we see in the early church. When I see the boldness and the moxie of the apostles in the early church, the last thing I see is *soft* Christianity.¹ The apostles and the early church had what Rich Mullins called "The reckless raging fury that they call the love of God."² Surrender was not an option for the early church. Soft was not an option for the early church.

And so my goal in today's message is to show you this great display of courage by Peter and the other apostles. And my hope is that this fires us up to be those same kinds of bold, courageous, moxie-filled disciples today.

Let's start with this. Let's start with the crisis.

1) The **Crisis** (5:17–20)

¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 297: "The passage [Acts 5:17–42] confirms the previous reports about the public proclamation of the gospel by the apostles, as Luke makes no fewer than five comments about their public preaching (vv. 20, 21, 25, 28, 42)."

² Rich Mullins, "The Love of God": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhKZn8gdN-E>

Here's what Luke says in **verse 17**.

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up,

That's ominous. The high priest rose up! Remember this is on the heels of that great outpouring of God's power earlier in **Acts 5**. People were getting saved. Ananias and Saphirra were struck dead. People were getting healed in droves. People were coming from the neighboring villages around Jerusalem to see the apostles. It was Spirit-filled pandemonium in Jerusalem.

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party³ of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy¹⁸ they arrested the apostles⁴ and put them⁵ in the public⁶ prison.⁷

Luke doesn't specify who among the apostles were arrested. But Peter was clearly one of them. Probably John was arrested too. And possibly it was all twelve of them including the new apostle Matthias. Welcome to the apostles, Matthias! Now you're getting arrested.

And remember now, the High Priest and these Sadducees were the ones who were jealous of Jesus.⁸ And because of that they put him to death. So they've got a problem with the tenth commandment.⁹ And they also have a violent streak in them.¹⁰ They don't want anyone disturbing the peace and making trouble with the Romans. And they don't want anyone circumventing existing power structures. If people are going to flock to Jerusalem, it should be for them, not for these upstart, wannabe teachers and Jesus-followers from Galilee.

So what do they do? They throw the apostles into prison. But check this out in **verse 19**.

¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out,¹¹

Don't you love that? When God wants something done, nobody is going to stop him.¹² **Even the entire army of Satan is putty in his hands.** So there's no way that a silly little thing like prison is going to hinder the Lord. So God sends an angel to release the apostles.

And there's a dash of irony in this scene, because Sadducees don't believe in angels.¹³ They are part of the liberal wing of Judaism at this time. They didn't believe in a lot of things that most Jews including the

³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 237: "Luke calls the Sadducees a 'party' or 'sect' (αἵρεσις, *haireisis*) within Judaism. Josephus (Ant. 13.5.9 §171) indicates that this term often has the meaning of a 'school' within Judaism (also 20.9.1 §199). The English term 'sect' has a connotation the Greek lacks. The term appears several times in Acts to refer to a movement within Judaism or another group and is best rendered 'party.'"

⁴ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 166: "After all the miracles they had seen, it is hard to understand how they felt prison bars would restrain the power of God. Throughout Acts, imprisonment would prove to be no obstacle to the Lord (cf. 12:3–11; 16:23ff.)."

⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 236: "There is an intensification of the opposition here, not a mere repetition of earlier themes... First, they take on only Jesus. Next, they pressure the lead apostles. Finally, they challenge all the apostles."

⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 166: "One should not miss the irony of their being placed in the public jail, i.e., openly and for everyone to see. Soon they would be unable to find these very ones who were so openly placed in jail."

⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 133: "This was the same prison in which Peter and John spent a night in Acts 4:3." Keener, *IVPBBNT*, Ac 5:18: "Jails were normally used for detention until trial, not for imprisonment as a punishment."

⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 305: "While in the gospel, Luke portrays the Pharisees as the major opponents of Jesus, in Acts it is the Sadducees which are often seen as more hostile against the followers of Jesus. This shift is explained by the move from Galilee to Jerusalem, where the Sadducees seem to have had control of the Sanhedrin." Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 237–8: "The Sadducees are often seen as more hostile to the new movement than the Pharisees in Acts, whereas in Luke's Gospel the Pharisees are major opponents of Jesus. This fits the shift of attention to Jerusalem from the setting of Jesus's ministry outside the city. The Sadducees have more to lose, since they control the council and have worked out a compromise with the Romans to share power. Any destabilizing element in the culture could threaten their control."

⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 10, Kindle: "These Sadducee leaders were envious of the popularity of the apostles and were self-protective of their own prestige. 'The crowd should be gathering around us, not them.'"

¹⁰ Keener, *IVPBBNT*, Ac 5:17: "The Sadducees were powerful but never gained the popularity that the Pharisees enjoyed. Although the political situation required them to maintain relations with the Pharisees, it is not surprising that they would be 'jealous' (cf. Mk 15:10) and act with hostility toward the apostles."

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 238: "This is the ultimate, cosmic overrule of the Jewish leadership as the sovereign God acts to free the apostles, opening the doors of their prison."

¹² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 237: "God is watching over them in the midst of the suffering. Victory can come through suffering. Political power will not stop them."

¹³ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 166.

Pharisees believed. So with just a little hint of irony, God uses an angel, which the Sadducees don't believe actually exist, to reverse the actions of the Sadducees. Isn't that great?

Look at the end of **verse 19**.

¹⁹ ... an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought [the apostles] out, and said,¹⁴

Said what? **"Just go home and lie low. Let the heat die down a bit."** Is that what he said? **"Just be safe! The most important thing is your safety. The most important thing is your health and your happiness and your comfort."** Is that what he said? No!¹⁵ He said in **verse 20**.

²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple¹⁶ and speak to the people all¹⁷ the words of this Life."¹⁸

"You mean go back to that place where we were arrested." Remember now, they've been arrested twice! **"You mean God wants us to go right back into the lion's den."**

"Yeah, that's right."

"Won't we just get arrested again?"

"Probably."

"Won't they be even more angry next time and try to beat us or kill us?"

"Yeah, there's a good chance of that."

"Okay, then. Let's do this."¹⁹

Look at **verse 21**.

²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak

They didn't even take a day off! As soon as the sun came up, they were back in the temple. and began to teach.²⁰

You know I did a little fake dialogue between the angel and the apostles to elevate the tension of this scene right here. But the truth is they didn't question the angel one bit. They just went back into the temple and started teaching again. **It's "hi-ho-hi-ho off to work I go" for these guys.** You've got to love their courage. These guys aren't going to be bullied into silence.

Write this down as a second movement in this passage. First there's the crisis. But then there's...

2) The **Misdirection** (5:21-26)

Luke says in **verse 21**.

²¹ And when [the apostles] heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

No hesitation. No equivocation. No delay. No fear of man. No timidity. They just go right back to teaching in the temple.²¹

¹⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 166: "The miraculous escape of the apostles is told with the greatest economy here. In vv. 21b-26 it will be retold in far greater detail. The emphasis is placed on the total helplessness of the Jewish authorities. In this way the lesson of Gamaliel's speech is illustrated vividly beforehand—"If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men" (v. 39)."

¹⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 134: "The apostles were to go, not to some secret, underground church, but to a very public place, the Temple compound."

¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 306-7: "The apostles are told to continue their preaching and teaching activity—in the temple, i.e., in public, not merely in the safer environment of the private houses in which the believers are also meeting. They are to return to the one place where they can be most easily found; it is the high priest who controls the temple, after all."

¹⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 307: "The apostles are told not to hold anything back. They must proclaim "all the words" (πάντα τὰ ῥήματα) about the life and salvation that Jesus alone can provide, not downplaying or omitting parts of the message that they had proclaimed earlier and that got them into trouble."

¹⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 166n118: "In Acts the terms 'salvation' and 'life' are virtually synonymous. Cf. 'life' in 3:15; 11:18; 13:46 with "salvation" in 4:12; 11:14; 15:11; 16:17, 30f." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 307: "The apostles are told to continue to focus their preaching and teaching on Jesus. The phrase 'the words about this life' (τὰ ῥήματα τῆς ζωῆς ταύτης) describes the message about Jesus. The 'words of this life' is the proclamation of Jesus as 'the author of life' (ὁ ἀρχηγός τῆς ζωῆς; 3:15). As a result of his resurrection, Jesus is the 'prince' of life at God's right hand; he is the 'pioneer' of life, who has made eternal life in the presence of God possible for all who believe; he is the 'founder' of the life in the restoration of the kingdom of God and in the new covenant."

¹⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 166: "They obviously were not concerned for their safety. They returned to the very spot where they had been arrested, preaching the same words of life for which they were arrested."

²⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 166: "They obviously were not concerned for their safety. They returned to the very spot where they had been arrested, preaching the same words of life for which they were arrested."

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the people of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought.

So this is comical.²² The apostles are teaching in the temple. And when the high priest came, he still thinks they're in prison. He calls the council together conceivably to prosecute the apostles. But they are completely unaware that the disciples got busted out of prison by an angel.

This is even more comical than you realize if you understand the topography of the temple complex. The apostles are on one side of the temple preaching probably in Solomon's Portico. That's roughly 400 meters from where the Sanhedrin are gathered.²³ So we have the Sanhedrin council gathering to prosecute the apostles. And unbeknownst to them, the apostles have escaped and are preaching just a short walk from them. This is pretty hilarious stuff right here. I'm not so sure that Luke didn't write this with a wry smile on his face.

What happens next? Well, look at **verse 22**.

²² But when the officers²⁴ 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,²⁵ but when we opened them we found no one inside."

What? What happened? How could this be?

²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple

Remember that the second in command at the temple behind the chief priest. and the chief priests [Annas and Caiaphas] heard these words, they were greatly perplexed

I bet they were! By the way the word "perplexed" here means "at a loss" or "confused." It doesn't mean "alarmed" or "afraid." They should be afraid, but they aren't. These religious leaders fear the wrong things. they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to.

I'm sure they were asking themselves, **"What's happening? What's going on here? How are we going to fix this?"** **These guys are bumbling along like the Keystone Cops.**²⁶

And as they were wondering, this happens in **verse 25**.

²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."²⁷

Conceivably the chief priests were walking through the temple *perplexed*, when they saw Peter and the other apostles teaching at Solomon's Portico.

²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force,²⁸ for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

Remember what I said about them being afraid of all the wrong things. They're afraid of the people. Why aren't they afraid of the God who just miraculously freed the apostles? Why aren't they afraid of the God who just struck down Ananias and Sapphira? Why aren't they afraid of the God who raised Jesus from the dead? Why aren't they afraid of the God who is empowering these apostles all throughout Jerusalem to heal people like crazy? They fear the wrong things.

But don't laugh too hard at them. Why? Because we fear the wrong things too. Don't we? "But what if they don't like me." "What if they reject me?" "What if my friends think I'm weird because I

²¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 242: "The undercurrent to the passage is that nothing will be able to stop the advance of the gospel message. Divine leading and protection are on the apostles' side. The opposition may persecute them but will never crush them."

²² Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 10, Kindle: "There is some divine humor here, too, because the Sadducees did not believe in angels. And yet here, right in their own city, were some close encounters of the spiritual kind."

²³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 307.

²⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 240: "These servants would be Levites under the command of the captain (Bruce 1990: 170; *m. Mid.* 1.2 describes the night watchmen; see 4:1). Barrett (1994: 286) discusses a 'street ballad' that portrays the violence these guards often utilize. The ballad offers woes for one who experiences the guards' clubs, whisperings, pen, and fists. Whether they use weapons or words, they are to be feared. Beatings are not out of the question. In the current circumstances, the guards could not use any persuasive power. The disappearance has seen to that."

²⁵ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Ac 5:22–26: "These guards are fortunate that they are Levites policing for the Jewish temple aristocracy rather than recruits under the Romans or Herod Agrippa I, who might have executed them (see 12:18–19)."

²⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 167: "The Sanhedrin was totally thwarted in its designs, totally helpless to control the situation. All was in God's hands. The only reason the apostles finally appeared before the Council was their own willingness to do so. And they were willing to do so because the events of the night had convinced them once more that they were very much in God's hands."

²⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 241: "The terms 'standing,' 'teaching,' and 'people' match the angel's instruction given in verse 20."

²⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 241: "The fact that a lack of violence is explicitly noted (on Jesus's arrest, contrast Luke 22:50–51) means that often roughhouse tactics were used, as the arrest of Jesus and the way they were prepared to use force also shows."

actually believe what the Bible says?” Who cares what they think! The apostles don’t care what anyone thinks. They only care what God thinks. They only fear God. Let God be true and everyman a liar.²⁹

Write this down as a third movement in this passage.

3) The **Resolve** (5:27–32)

This is my favorite part of this narrative. If you thought the previous part was good, wait till you see what happens next. Look at **verse 27**.

²⁷ And when they had brought them, they [the temple officers] set them [the apostles] before the council.³⁰ And the high priest questioned them,³¹ ²⁸ saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name,³²

He won’t even speak the name of Jesus. It’s like bad karma or something to him.

yet here you have filled³³ Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s³⁴ blood upon us.”³⁵

That’s a pretty interesting statement at the end there. In fairness to the high priest, that’s exactly what the disciples were doing. They were telling people, even the high priest himself, **“You killed this man, Jesus Christ.”** No bones about it. They were laying blame on the Sanhedrin for Jesus.

But they were right to do that. Jesus had stood before them, in this same place, in front of the Sanhedrin a few months earlier, and they had orchestrated his death. They even said at one point to Pilate, “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” (**Matt 27:25**).³⁶ Peter didn’t say that first. They said that!³⁷

It’s possible that the high priest assumes that these disciples want vengeance for the death of Jesus. Maybe he was thinking, **“They’re trying to get the people to riot and retaliate for the wrongful death of Jesus.”** But that’s not Peter’s purpose. Peter’s purpose, even in his accusation, **“You killed Jesus Christ”** was

²⁹ JOHN CALVIN: “Because God guards the kingdom of Christ, no force will ever be able to overthrow it. Because the teaching of the gospel has its foundation in God, no matter how people may fight against it or shake it, still it will remain secure.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 69.

³⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 309: “The Twelve are taken into the council hall and placed in front of the Sanhedrin. They are made to stand where Peter and John had stood several weeks earlier (4:7), and where Jesus had stood during his trial (Luke 22:66).”

³¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 168: “He made absolutely no reference to the apostles’ escape. Was this out of total embarrassment?”

³² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 168n120: In the period after the fall of Jerusalem (post a.d. 70), Christians were placed by Pharisaic orthodoxy under a formal curse or ban (the *birkat ha minim*), and uttering the name of Jesus was indeed considered blasphemy. It was scrupulously avoided in the rabbinic writings.”

³³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 246: “They ‘have filled’ (πεπληρώκατε, *peplērōkate*) Jerusalem with this teaching. The perfect tense here is used with an extensive or consummative force: Jerusalem is like a cup filled to the full with their teaching (Wallace 1996: 577).”

³⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 246: “The high priest cannot even say Jesus’s name, calling him ‘this man’ (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου, *tou anthrōpou toutou*), a negative, distancing expression also appearing in Luke (23:4, 14; but more positively in 23:47).”

³⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 246: “The expression ‘His blood be upon us’ is an idiom for being responsible for someone’s death (Matt. 23:35; 27:25).” Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 136: “By using the expression ‘this man,’ Luke showed that the religious leaders still refused to even mention the name ‘Yeshua.’ But, as they could be reminded, it was not the apostles who brought the blood of Yeshua upon them; they had brought it upon themselves, as reflected in Matthew 27:25, when they said: his blood be upon us and our children.”

³⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 311: “If someone has been unjustly executed, his spilled blood comes with vengeance over those responsible for the wrongful execution—this is the thought here, as in the action of Pontius Pilate who washes his hands and declares that he is innocent of Jesus’ blood (Matt 27:24). Because the Jewish leaders were convinced that Jesus was not innocent and deserved to die, they asserted that his blood may come upon them and their children (Matt 27:25)—thus assuming juridical responsibility for Jesus’ death in the assumption that it is only the execution of an innocent person that causes the death of those who are guilty of innocent blood. When the responsibility for a wrongful execution (or murder) of a person is placed on another person, the same juridical assumption is made—as here (cf. 18:6; Matt 27:25). Perhaps the high priest accuses the apostles of seeking divine retribution for Jesus’ execution, asking God to inflict punishment on the Jewish leadership.1415 Perhaps the high priest fears a popular uprising, insinuating that the apostles are planning to turn the city against the Jewish leaders in some deliberate, perhaps violent action.”

³⁷ MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 168: “Peter and the rest had boldly indicted the Jewish leaders for the role in Jesus’ death (cf. 2:23, 36; 3:15; 4:10–11). The high priest conveniently forgot, however, that he and his associates had said to Pilate, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’”

never vengeance. He's seeking instead repentance.³⁸ And many have repented. But not these Jewish leaders. Peter's still holding out hope that these religious leaders might get saved.³⁹

Now notice how the strategy of the high priest subtly changes in this interrogation. At first they tried to intimidate the disciples. **"Stop preaching in that name!"** And they threw them in prison... twice. But I think that they can see now that that tactic isn't working. They keep preaching and the message keeps going out. So now he tries something different. Instead of bullying them into silence, he's going to try to guilt them into silence. Here's what I mean.

That statement, at the end of **verse 28** is telling, "you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Do you hear what he's saying? **"Everything was fine and great until you started telling people about Jesus. And now people think we're guilty for murder! But we're innocent."** In other words, **"If you just would have kept your mouth shut, then everything would have been hunky-dory. But you're blaming us for Jesus's death."** This isn't intimidation here. This is a good old-fashioned sob-story. This is the high priest trying to absolve himself of guilt.

Now watch Peter's answer to the high priest. Peter has been uninfluenced by their intimidation in the past. But now the high priest has changed tactics. How's he going to respond to this statement: **"You intend to bring this man's blood upon us... but we didn't do anything wrong!"**

Look at **verse 29**,

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey⁴⁰ God rather than men."⁴¹

Peter ignores the whole "we didn't do anything wrong" statement, and he goes straight to the heart of the matter. "We must obey God." The high priest told him, **"We told you to stop talking about that 'name' ... you know which 'name' I'm talking about."** And Peter replies, "We must obey God rather than men." He's resolved!

They told Peter and John in **Acts 4** to stop preaching in Jesus's name. And Peter's response then was the same as it is here. Peter just lays it down, "We must obey God rather than men." That's it. There's no mystery here. **"God outranks you, high priest. I must obey him."**

But Peter and the apostles have more to say. They're resolved on another matter too. Look at **verse 30**.

³⁰ The God of our fathers⁴² raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

The chief priest was like, **"You intend to bring this man's blood upon us."** Peter's like, **"You're right, I am."⁴³ You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree. And this Jesus is the one that the God of our fathers, the God of the Israelites, raised from the dead."⁴⁴**

³⁸ CHRYSOSTOM: "It was not with defiance that the apostles answered them, for they were teachers... For they were not angered, but they pitied and wept over them and looked for a way to free them from their error and anger." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 66.

³⁹ CHRYSOSTOM: "Notice how every time they mention the crime, they add the mention of forgiveness, showing that what had been done was worthy of death but what was given was offered as if to benefactors." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 66.

⁴⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 246: "The verb for 'obey' (πειθαρχέω, *peitharcheō*) appears only four times in the NT (Acts 5:29, 32; 27:21; Titus 3:1–2). The use of δεῖ (*dei*, must) suggests a moral necessity for this obedience. God has the claim on the apostles, and this has priority over any other group."

⁴¹ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 137: "This moral necessity left the apostles no choice, for they had to obey God; if obedience to God meant disobedience to man, so be it. This is an eternal principle: The apostles were under a higher authority, and so are all believers. They are to obey both God and man where possible, for the Bible commands believers to obey those in authority. However, if this human authority commands believers to do that which the Bible clearly forbids, then believers must choose to go with God's higher authority."

⁴² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 247: "Reference to 'the God of our fathers' shows that Peter still identifies with the Jewish people and faith; thus he appeals to God as the God of promise (see 3:13). Peter and the apostles declare nothing other than what God said long ago when they claim that God raised up Jesus. Some scholars argue, given the parallel in 3:15, that this probably refers to the resurrection and not to arising on the scene of history (Barrett 1994: 289). A case can be made, however, that the resurrection is referred to in 5:31 and so this reference is distinct and means to arise on the scene of history as a Messiah, just as other great figures arose in Israel's past (Judg. 2:18; 3:9, 15). Either sense is possible, as either meaning is logical."

⁴³ Technically this is Peter and the apostles talking (see 5:29), but for simplicity sake, I'm just going to refer to Peter. Clearly Luke is summarizing a longer, more involved conversation between the apostles and the Jewish leaders.

Notice that word “tree” in **verse 30**. That’s the first time that Peter has used that terminology, although he’s spoken of the cross before. **Like all good preachers, Peter is repeatedly sharing the gospel, but he’s doing it in a unique way.**⁴⁵

The word for “tree” here is the Greek word ξύλον. It’s clearly a reference to the cross. But the language of ξύλον reflects the LXX of **Deuteronomy 21:23**: “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” Peter is aware of that when he uses this language, and coincidentally so are the Jewish leaders. He’s saying, in effect, you cursed him. You cursed this Jesus who God raised from the dead. But even that was part of God’s plan because as **Galatians 3:13** tells us “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree [ξύλον].’”

Let’s keep reading in **verse 31**. Peter’s on a roll.

³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance⁴⁶ to Israel⁴⁷ and forgiveness of sins.

By the way, take a quick look at **Acts 4:29**. What did the disciples pray for in **Acts 4:29**? “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” Was that prayer answered? Peter’s on fire here. He is unflinching and unintimidated in his proclamation of the gospel before some very powerful, very devious people.

And notice too, Peter doesn’t speak of vengeance here.⁴⁸ Peter didn’t say, “**Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father right now reigning down wrath and vengeance on his enemies! He’s at command control right now, just waiting for the codes to launch missiles in your direction.**” No. Peter says, “**Jesus, in his post-resurrection state, at the right hand of the Father, is offering forgiveness of sins through repentance.**” That’s the gospel. Peter’s preaching saving faith to the very people responsible for Jesus’s death.

Peter is saying here, “**Yes, you did kill the Son of God. Stop denying it. But the good news is that he’s offering you forgiveness not retaliation.**”

Let me say something right here. Let me pause this story and say something applicationally. If you think you’ve done some horrible things in your life... if you think you’ve committed some unforgiveable sin... Listen, God offered forgiveness to the very people who condemned his Son and sentenced him to be crucified. We’re all guilty of that sin in some way or another. It was my sin that sent Jesus to the cross. We’re all responsible for crucifying the Son of God. You think your sins are worse than that? God is willing to forgive you, even right now. Repentance and faith, that’s what God requires of you. Repentance and faith bring about the forgiveness of your sins.

And look at **verse 32**.

⁴⁴ The NIV has “raised Jesus from the dead.” This is interpretative. The statement about Jesus being “raised” could be a reference to the resurrection, although it could also be a reference to Jesus be “raised” onto the scene as the Messiah. Commentators disagree, but I’m inclined to see ἐγείρω here as a reference to resurrection (see Matt 28:6; Acts 10:40; 13:37; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15ff; 2 Cor 4:14). See BDAG, ἐγείρω ⑥, 271.

⁴⁵ Peter uses this term again in 1 Peter 2:24, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [ξύλον], that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

⁴⁶ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 212–3: “Repentance is triggered through the hearing of the Word, which brings the conviction of sin. But this act is not done by our own efforts; the grace to repent is given by Christ (v. 31b). Though Calvinists and Arminians may differ over the possibility of resisting the saving grace of God, they will agree, if they seek to be biblical, that the ability to respond to grace is a gift from God.”

⁴⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 248: “Peter is highlighting that instead of the apostolic message about Jesus being a threat to the nation, as the leadership treats it, here is a chance to experience national blessing (Israel in Acts up to this point: 1:6; 2:36; 4:10, 27; 5:21). Jesus’s exaltation means that the blood of Jesus need not remain on the leaders’ heads. For with repentance and the forgiveness God offers through Jesus, all culpability can be forgiven. That the nation is at risk because of how its leaders have acted is an idea similar to the impact of kings on the nation in Samuel and Kings. The offer is of repentance to Israel so that the nation can be forgiven. This offer of forgiveness that Jesus makes explains why he can also be called Savior.”

⁴⁸ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 311: “The Twelve have indeed been accusing the Jewish leaders for being responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion (2:23, 36; 3:13–15, 17; 4:10–11, 27; cf. 10:39; 13:27). However, there is no trace of a desire for vindictive retaliation. On the contrary, Peter teaches that the Jewish people and their leaders acted out of ignorance, that Jesus’ crucifixion and subsequent resurrection was part of God’s plan, and that the Jewish people can repent, accept Jesus as God’s Messiah, and thus find salvation and times of refreshing (2:23; 3:17–21).”

³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit,⁴⁹ whom God has given to those who obey⁵⁰ him.”⁵¹

Peter has shared this same gospel multiple times in **Acts**. He did it in **Acts 2**. He did it in **Acts 3**. He did it in **Acts 4**. He just can't stop. He can't hold it in.

And there are times when Peter preaches and the people respond so wonderfully. And Hallelujah, people get saved! There are times in **Acts** when the gospel is shared, and the gospel-sharer becomes the aroma of life to those who are being saved. God shows up and wonderful things happen. And people sins are forgiven. And it smells great!

And then there are these other times... like here in **Acts 5:33**... There are other times when the gospel-sharer becomes *not* the “aroma of life,” but the “aroma of death.” When the people just don't get it.

So, look at **verse 33**. This is tragic.

³³ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.⁵²

Is this an “aroma of life” moment or an “aroma of death” moment? What do you think? Paul said in **2 Corinthians 2:15–17**, “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”

Peter has become the aroma of death to these who are perishing. **“Why even say anything, Peter? What a waste of time!” Listen, hear me on this. “If you are not willing to be the aroma of death to those who are perishing, you can never be the aroma of life to those who are being saved.” We don't know who's going to get saved when we share the gospel. We don't know, and we have no power over that. We are witnesses. That's what we do. And we leave the results to God.**

So they wanted to kill Peter and the other apostles. Why? Because they shared the gospel with them. And truth be told, they probably would have killed Peter and the other apostles, just like they killed Jesus a few months before. But God had a different plan for them. Into this crisis, steps this man, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel.

Write this down as a fourth movement in this passage.

4) The **Voice** of **Reason** (5:33–40)

Before we get to Gamaliel, let me just say this. Sometimes God's messengers get killed. The apostles here could very easily have been killed.⁵³ We'll see in a few weeks a man named Stephen who gets killed. Sometimes God's witnesses get killed, and then sometimes they get rescued.⁵⁴ Sometimes the angel opens up the prison doors and sets the captives free. That happens repeatedly in the book of **Acts**. Other times God leaves

⁴⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 248: “The mention of the Spirit means that all three persons of the Trinity are noted in Peter's reply. God raised and exalted Jesus, whom God's Spirit testifies to.”

⁵⁰ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 211: “[Peter's] obedience gives him a credibility that qualifies him later on to write to the church about obedience (see 1 Peter 1:2, 14, 22; 3:1, 6; 4:17).”

⁵¹ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Ac 5:32: “The apostles' reply indicates that they do not regard the Sanhedrin as obedient to God.”

⁵² MacArthur, *Acts 1–11*, MNTC, 171: “By charging the Sanhedrin with executing the Messiah, the apostles assaulted their spirituality. Finally, by winning large numbers of converts they threatened the Sadducees' domination of the people. They had had enough and were intended to slay the troubling apostles.”

⁵³ JOHN CALVIN: “The Lord brought the apostles out of prison, not because he wished to deliver them from the hand of their enemies forever, for later on he allowed them to be brought back again and be beaten with rods. But by this miracle he meant to demonstrate that they were in his hand and care for the defense of faith in his gospel, partly in order that the church might find fresh encouragement from the event and partly to leave the ungodly without any excuse. For that reason we must not always hope, not even are we to desire, that God may deliver us from death; but the proper thing for us is to be content that our life is protected by his hand, as needs be.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 66.

⁵⁴ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 220: “If God can save us and does not, it is only because he has some greater good in mind.”

his saints in prison, like Paul for instance, who wrote many of his epistles in stinking, filthy prisons.⁵⁵ Why didn't God rescue him? Well that's God's prerogative.

Why doesn't God always save us from suffering in this world? Well he never promised to do that. Not in this world. In fact he promised us the opposite, namely that we would suffer.

Several years ago, there was a pastor from Idaho who was arrested in Iran. He had been imprisoned there for a while. And many people petitioned, even famous Christian musicians, to get the UN involved to rescue him. I've got no problem with that. I signed that petition. And praise God, that pastor was released in 2016 by the Iranian government.

But listen, hear me on this. There are pastors every day in other parts of the world that are held captive and don't get released. Christians get attacked and killed every day in this world. All of that is God's prerogative. And we are called to trust that God's greater purposes are at work even when tragedy befalls his people. **And just like that's true for Christians and Pastors in other parts of the world with their tragic and painful circumstances, it's true for you and me with the less painful circumstances we go through.**

So what's God going to do here with these apostles? Let's find out. Look at **verse 34**.

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 outside⁵⁶ for a little while.

Now this guy, Gamaliel (or Gamaliel the Elder as he was known⁵⁷), was the most respected Jew of his day.⁵⁸ He was a Pharisee. He actually trained Paul when he was younger (see **Acts 22:3**). And even though he was a Pharisee, he was extremely respected by the Sadducees.⁵⁹

Just to give you an idea of how well-respected he was, when he died, a Rabbinic saying from the Mishnah circulated in Israel, which went like this, **"When Rabban Gamaliel the elder died, the glory of the law ceased and purity and abstinence died."**⁶⁰ That's pretty high praise! That's how revered this man was in Jewish circles. So when he starts to speak, you can be sure that everyone leaned in to listen to him.

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.

Now we're not really sure who this Theudas was. Obviously he was a revolutionary around this time. Actually, there were lots of guys like this who rose up and started a revolt against the occupying Romans. But

⁵⁵ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 306: "Since God's intervention in human affairs is, by definition, an expression of his sovereignty and never the result of human manipulation, he can free the apostles on this and on several later occasions, though he does not free Paul in AD 57 when Paul is imprisoned in Jerusalem (23:10–11) and Caesarea (23:35) or in AD 60 when he is imprisoned in Rome (28:16)."

⁵⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 171: "Gamaliel's power in the Sanhedrin is subtly reflected in his ordering the apostles to be removed 'for a little while.' Such matters were generally the prerogative of the high priest, and his reference to 'a little while' reflects his confidence that it wouldn't take him long to sway the court."

⁵⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 249n4: "He is called Gamaliel the Elder nineteen times in the Talmud: *b. Erub.* 45a; *b. Roš Haš.* 23b, 29b; *b. Yebam.* 90b, 115a, 122a (3x); *b. Mo'ed Qat.* 27a; *b. Ketub.* 10b; *b. Soṭah* 49a; *b. Giṭ.* 32a, 33a, 34b, 35b; *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 11a; *b. Ber.* 38a; *b. Nid.* 6b. He is referred to as Gamaliel I nine more times: *b. Ber.* 43b; *b. Šabb* 33a, 136a; *b. Pesah.* 88b; *b. Ta'an.* 30a; *b. Meg.* 18a; *b. Sanh.* 31a, 39a, 48b. On the Pharisees, see additional note on 5:34."

⁵⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 234: "It is the first speech by a non-Christian in Acts and as such has great significance."

⁵⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 249: "The only thing to stop the move toward seeking the apostles' death is a speech by a leading rabbinic figure of the Sanhedrin, a member of the Pharisees. This party within Judaism tried to keep the nation faithful to the law but was in the position of being the opposition to the political power in Israel under the Hasmoneans except under Salome Alexandra. That situation prevailed until the Romans came to power (Bruce 1990: 174–75). Under Herod, they came to have more power but still functioned as a minority (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.3 §14; 18.1.4 §17)."

⁶⁰ As quoted in Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 139. Fruchtenbaum adds, "Most rabbis were simply called *Rav* or *Ravi*, which means 'teacher' or 'my teacher' respectively, but Gamaliel was called *Rabban*. This is a title above a rabbi and means 'our teacher.' It was given to the head of the School of Hillel." Keener, *IVPBBNT*, Ac 5:34–35: "That Gamaliel I, the most prominent pupil of the gentle Hillel, was widely respected may be an understatement; he was probably the most influential Pharisaic leader of the time and held prestige as a Jerusalem aristocrat as well. Later rabbis extolled his piety and learning, and accorded him the title 'Rabban,' which later belonged to the rulers of the Pharisaic courts."

then they got crushed by the Roman army. And so the people would get all riled up about this new “messiah” who would rise up, but it would quickly come to nothing.

Look at **verse 37**.

³⁷ *After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him.*

We know a little more about this Judas the Galilean. This is not Judas Iscariot. This is a different Judas. Judas or Judah was a common name in first century Israel.

Judas the Galilean led the tax revolt of AD 6, shortly after Jesus was born.⁶¹ The Romans retaliated by destroying the city of Sepphoris.⁶² Judas became an example to other revolutionaries or “zealots” as they were later called. Judas’s sons were “zealots,” and they were killed in a later war as well.

Gamaliel says in **verse 37**,

He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

They come and they go. They come and they go. That’s what Gamaliel is insinuating. He’s basically saying, **“Just like Theudas, and just like Judas the Galilean, this Jesus, who we crucified, his followers will disperse as well.”** **“So take a chill-pill, Sadducees. Just relax. This’ll all be over before you know it.”**⁶³

Actually he goes on to say something a little more astute than that. Look at **verse 38**.

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.* ⁶⁴ *You might even be found opposing God!*⁶⁵

Literally he says, “You might find yourself as God-fighters.” That’s *not* good. You don’t want to find yourself in that position. But of course, even though they don’t know it, they’re already God-fighters. They put God the Son to death!

Look at the end of **verse 39**.

*So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them⁶⁶ and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*⁶⁷

How many think the apostles are really going to keep silent after this? **“We mean it now! Stop speaking in that name! Don’t let us catch you again!”** They just don’t get it. They don’t understand how deeply held their faith in Jesus is. He’s the most important thing in their life. He’s everything to them. They cannot **“not”** tell people about Jesus!

This Gamaliel character is kind of hard to figure out. Should I like him or not?⁶⁸ He’s kind of enigmatic. He’s a complex character full of both good and bad.⁶⁹ There’s wisdom in what he says, but he’s also apathetic towards the gospel.⁷⁰

⁶¹ The Theudus mentioned by Josephus was too late to be this Theudus. Perhaps Josephus recorded the wrong date? See Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 315.

⁶² Keener, *IVPBBCT*, Ac 5:37: “Judas the Galilean led the tax revolt of A.D. 6. The Romans retaliated by destroying Sepphoris; Judas’s model led to the revolutionaries who later came to be called the Zealots. Judas’s sons also revolted in the war of 66–70; they were crucified. Judas was helped by a certain Saddok—a Pharisee. Gamaliel would naturally view such revolutionaries more favorably than the Sadducees would, since the Sadducees had more vested interests in Roman rule.”

⁶³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 317: “His argument is pragmatic rather than pro-Christian. Since the historical examples that he uses in his speech are both failed movements, Gamaliel more likely has a negative view of the movement initiated by Jesus.”

⁶⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 250: “This reliance on divine sovereignty fits with the belief of the Pharisees.”

⁶⁵ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 217: “But should we always follow the principle that if a group succeeds in the long run, it must be of God? Not always. Scripture contains many essential truths. If a movement contradicts those truths, it is wrong even if it grows. God may not be the one causing its success. It may be Satan, or brilliant strategizing, or the fact that this group addresses the felt needs of the people. The recent growth of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Muslims does not indicate God’s approval of those movements, for they refuse to accept basic tenets of God’s revelation.”

⁶⁶ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 144: “They received the ‘forty stripes save one,’ which was based upon Deuteronomy 25:2–3. For the first time in the history of the church, believers suffered physically because of their faith, as there was no beating in the first persecution.”

⁶⁷ JOHANN SPANGENBERG: “It stands written, ‘If a person deserves to be beaten, then before the judge, forty strokes should be given to him, and no more.’ This law God gave for the godless, so here the Jews invert it and pummel the true preachers of the divine Word. Everything is upside down with them.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 70.

⁶⁸ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 251: “Gamaliel has everything at his disposal to see the truth but, like other Pharisees, refuses to join. Still he sees that to interfere with the apostles will not help.”

Here's what John MacArthur says about him (I'm inclined to agree with this): "Gamaliel was a pragmatist – a poor substitute for being a good biblical scholar. Such lethargy on his part is not commendable in light of what he knew of the Scripture and what he knew of the work of Jesus and the power of the apostles in his name... apparently Gamaliel had no problem with the whipping, again revealing his indifference."⁷¹

So there's Gamaliel for you. Smart, intelligent, well-spoken, and revered. He's the voice of reason in this narrative that probably saved the apostles' lives. Yet he's also passive, indifferent, lethargic, and pragmatic. **Don't imitate that guy. Don't be like that.**

If you want to imitate something in this passage, imitate this. Look at **verse 41**. Imitate these guys.

⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer⁷² dishonor for the name.⁷³

⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Write this down as a fifth movement in this passage.

5) The **Joy** of the **Lord** (5:41–42)

What did these guys do after getting beaten and threatened? How did they respond? They didn't pout. They didn't sulk. They didn't drift off into despondency.⁷⁴ They rejoiced.⁷⁵ They counted themselves worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus.⁷⁶ They rejoiced, and also they got back to work as witnesses.⁷⁷

Look again at **verse 42**.

⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching⁷⁸ Jesus as the Christ.⁷⁹

They are back teaching and preaching! These apostles are like a Jack-in-the-box. The religious leaders keep trying to suppress them. But they just keep popping up in the temple telling people about Jesus.

By the way, this was no run-of-the-mill beating that they endured. The Greek word in **verse 40** for "beat" indicates a "flogging." It was probably the standard "forty lashes minus one" treatment that would have ripped skin off their backs.... They probably had difficulty walking and talking after this scourging by the

⁶⁹ CHRYSOSTOM goes too far when he says, "In fact, this man all but preached the gospel." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 68.

⁷⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 142: "There is no need to assume that Gamaliel was a 'secret believer' or that he defended the apostles because he was seriously contemplating that Yeshua might be the Messiah. It is more likely that his method of acting prudently and his theological differences with the Sadducees were the driving force behind his defense of the apostles." Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 217: "We should add here that there is an attitude that Gamaliel expressed toward the gospel that we clearly should not follow. He did not make a commitment about Christ. Instead, he waited to see what would happen. As far as we know, Gamaliel himself died waiting to see whether the Christian movement was really of God. The call of the gospel is to respond to God's voice today (2 Cor. 6:2; Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7)."

⁷¹ MacArthur, *Acts I–II*, MNTC, 173.

⁷² Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 252–3: "Here is the exemplary attitude of the church, willing to preach Jesus and suffer for the honor. This theme is a part of Jesus's teaching and appears in the Epistles [Matthew 5:11–12; 10:17–22; Mark 13:9–13; Luke 6:22–23; 12:11–12; 21:12–19; John 15:18–25; 16:2–3; Rom. 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 6:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24; Heb. 10:34; James 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:6–7; 4:12–16. For the honor/glory contrast, see John 8:49–50; Rom. 1:21, 24; 1 Cor. 15:43; 2 Cor. 6:8; Schneider 1980: 404n175]."

⁷³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 144: "While the Sanhedrin meant to dishonor Yeshua by not mentioning His name, the Jewish believers were willing to be proud of it and to pay the price for it (3 Jn. 3)."

⁷⁴ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 213: "The disgrace was an indicator of their worth, so they felt honored by the dishonor!"

⁷⁵ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 224: "Calvin agrees that most of us do not think in this way: 'Hardly one in a hundred understands that the ignominy of Christ is superior to all the triumphs of the world.'"

⁷⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 252: "In a strongly shame-honor-oriented society, to be dishonored normally would be considered shameful (BAGD 120; BDAG 148). The phrase 'counted worthy to suffer dishonor' is an oxymoron, a dishonor that is a cause for joy."

⁷⁷ And according to Acts 6:1, the church grew! But unfortunately, problems within the church grew too (see 6:1–7).

⁷⁸ Keener, *IVPBBCNT*, Ac 5:41–42: "'Teaching' is primarily instruction; 'preaching' is especially proclamation of the saving gospel."

⁷⁹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 253: "The word order of the Greek τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν (*ton christon Iēsoun*, the Christ as Jesus) emphasizes the identification of the Messiah as Jesus."

Sanhedrin.⁸⁰ And yet there they are, rejoicing and praising God.⁸¹ And getting back to work with the thing that just got them arrested.⁸²

Let me just say this. If these apostles could stand up to the very men who put Jesus to death and rejoice in their affliction and severe pain, then we can do the same in our less painful and strenuous circumstances today. Agreed?

If they can evangelize in that context, then we can evangelize in our context. If they can have joy when their backs are cracked and bleeding, then we can too when our hearts are broken, or our friends reject us, or our family members think we're crazy.

Let me give you three applications, and then we're done. Here's the first.

1) Don't let anyone **bully** you into **silence**

We are Christ Jesus's witnesses. We cannot be silent.⁸³

You might say, "Yeah Tony, but you don't understand how difficult it is to share my faith at work." "You don't know how my family is about religion." "You don't know how far gone my kids are." Listen to me, hear me on this, don't be soft. Don't let people bully you into a place of silence. Can any of your family or friends or coworkers be any worse than these first century Sadducees? I doubt it. They put an innocent man, Jesus, to death for healing people and teaching the truth.⁸⁴ Jesus's disciples weren't silent, and we can't be either about the gospel."⁸⁵

"You don't understand, Tony. People will hate me and ostracize me if I tell them I'm a Christian." Yeah, well tell that to these men who risked, bled, and died so that the gospel might eventually reach you.

Listen, I don't mean to be insensitive. Christianity is not a gravy-train. It's not easy. And it was never meant to be.⁸⁶ Friendship with Christ means enmity with the world (see Jas 4:4-8). That's the way it's got to be. So don't be soft. Surrender is not an option. Don't let people bully you into silence."⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 252: "Beating (δέπω, *derō*) is mentioned in only three passages in Acts (5:39-40; 16:37; 22:19-20). The flogging looks forward to what Paul will suffer. Such flogging is regulated in *m. Mak.* 3.10-14. It is probably the "forty lashes minus one" (Deut. 25:3; 2 Cor. 11:24; Mark 13:9 is fulfilled; *m. Kil.* 8.3; *m. Mak.* 1.1; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.8.21 §238). The whipping would have been on the back and chest with a three-stranded strap of calf hide (Polhill 1992: 174). This could leave one close to death, if not dead, from loss of blood (Marshall 1980: 124). The hope is that by intensifying the punishment, a deterrent will be established. They are wrong."

⁸¹ CHRYSOSTOM: "Of course, the scourging was no cause of satisfaction, to be sure—rather of pain and distress; but scourging for the sake of God and the grounds on which they were scourged gave rise to satisfaction in them.... Such a powerful and invincible thing is virtue, proving superior even in the course of suffering such torments." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 69.

⁸² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 174: "The flogging referred to was the customary punishment used as a warning not to persist in an offense. It consisted of thirty-nine lashes, often referred to as the forty less one (cf. 2 Cor 11:24). Based on the provision for forty stripes given in Deut 25:3, the practice had developed of only giving thirty-nine in the event of miscounting, preferring to err on the side of clemency rather than severity. It was still a cruel punishment. With bared chest and in a kneeling position, one was beaten with a tripled strap of calf hide across both chest and back, two on the back for each stripe across the chest. Men were known to have died from the ordeal."

⁸³ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 10, Kindle: "Regardless of how hostile and oppressive our surroundings, no matter how philistine the workplace, how callous the students, how neurotic the neighbors, we are meant to share Christ by life and word."

⁸⁴ POLYCARP OF SMYRNA: "Let us then continually persevere in our hope and the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, 'who bore our sins in his own body on the tree,' 'who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth,' but who endured all things for us, that we might live in him. Let us then be imitators of his patience; and if we suffer for his name's sake, let us glorify him." Quoted in Chung-Kim and Hains, *Acts: New Testament*, RCS, 69.

⁸⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 10, Kindle: "We flatter ourselves if we imagine we have known anything like the oppression they knew. But we also make a mistake if we imagine we are immune. We do face waves of opposition, though they are more subtle. Sometimes we do not even know they have overwhelmed us. But the enemy knows and celebrates because we no longer speak and teach "the full message of this new life" (v. 20). When we are in such a state, the world does not see the glory of men and women fully alive. Our disobedience has cut us off from the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no joy, no buoyance.

⁸⁶ MacArthur, *Acts 1-11*, MNTC, 165: "A pure, powerful church will inevitably provoke a hostile reaction from the satanic world system. Successful Christians and churches will make waves, and the world and Satan will retaliate with persecution."

⁸⁷ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, chapter 10, Kindle: "Some good self-check questions are:

1. Am I living consistently in view of what I know about Christ?

Yes, be shrewd. Yes, be discerning about when to talk and when not to talk. Jesus talked about the importance of picking your spots and not casting pearls before swine. But don't let shrewdness become an excuse for silence. Be bold and be courageous in your sharing of the gospel.⁸⁸

Secondly,

2) Don't let anyone **feign innocence**

With not a little irony, the chief priest told Peter and the other apostles, "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Uh, yeah! Because this man's blood *is* upon you. Peter said, "You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree! Of course his blood is upon you."

Now people in our day won't say, "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us." They won't cop to putting Jesus on the cross. They won't understand that if you say it. But they will say something like this, "I'm a mostly good person." "God will accept me because my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds." Or they will say, "I'm innocent of anything really bad. It's not like I've murdered anyone."

And we, as witnesses for Christ, have to step into the void of that ignorance and feigned innocence and say, "No, friend. You are a sinner separated from a holy God. And Christ Jesus was the innocent sufferer. He died to pay the penalty for your sins."⁸⁹ Don't let anyone feign innocence.

And thirdly,

3) Don't let anyone **steal** your **joy**

In his **Acts commentary**, Eckhard Schnabel says, "Christians can have joy in the midst of suffering not because they enjoy suffering. Believers in Jesus are not masochists—pain or humiliation is always the result of sin and thus evil and can therefore never be the cause of pleasure. Christians have joy in the midst of suffering because they suffer for the name of Jesus. Christians who suffer for the sake of Jesus share in God's mission to save the world through his son Jesus Christ, which is cause for rejoicing. And they have been promised 'reward[s]' in heaven (Luke 6:22–23) if and when they suffer in faithful discipleship."⁹⁰

So don't let anyone steal your joy. They might destroy this body. So what! They might insult you and denigrate you and try to tear down your self-esteem. Let 'em try. They can kill the body, but they can't kill the soul.

And someday we'll go to a place where the events of this life will seem like a drop in the ocean. The events of this world and the suffering we endured will be like a speck of dust lying on the surface of the moon. Someday we'll be in eternity with the Lord. And I wanted to take some other people with me to that place. So don't be soft. Keep preaching what you believe. And let's ask God to use us to bring about the work of salvation. Amen?

2. Am I living a life that is in accord with what I am learning in the Scriptures?

3. Am I refusing to do what I know he wants?

4. Am I refusing to share my faith because of fear of rejection or appearing unintellectual or uncultured or any other reason?"

⁸⁸ Fernando, *Acts*, NIVAC, 216: "The divine encouragement to persist in witness in spite of threats is a recurrent theme in Acts (4:31; 18:9–10; 23:11). This not only shows how important witness is, but also that people need constant encouragement, for it is easy to lose passion for evangelism, especially in the face of opposition."

⁸⁹ MacArthur, *Acts I–II*, MNTC, 171: "If the gospel that we preach is not convicting enough to make some men angry, is it convicting enough to bring salvation?"

⁹⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 322.