

**8/30/15**

**Acts 5:17-21**

## **A Different Kind of Following**

*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.*

Acts is the story of the church – a church powered by the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Trinity), and from the time the Holy Spirit came down with power in Acts 2, God's people, Christian people, were considered to be *different*...not *completely* different but at least *obviously* different.

In Acts 2, there were tongues of fire and sounds of wind and miraculously translated languages. In Acts 3, a lame homeless man is made to walk. In Acts 4, buildings shake at a prayer meeting. In Acts 5, hypocrites fall dead, sick people are made well, afflicted people are made whole and possessed people are made clean. My goodness, even Peter's *shadow* had the power to heal people.

The church *was* different. The people had power --spiritual power-- but that spiritual power comes at a cost. That's what this passage is about: the real cost of having God's power in your life. When Christ saves you and owns you, when He redeems you and holds you, it makes you *obviously, radically* and *tangibly* different. But that difference, that spiritual power, comes at a price. In the text, the lives of the Apostles and the early Christians were driven by the Gospel, and as you read this section, you find out that all of life is different if you are driven by the Gospel.

## **All of Life Is Different If You Follow Christ**

Let's look at the text and delve into a couple of things about being a Christian.

### **Being a Christian Means Real Opposition**

If you really believe the Gospel and if that belief is evident, then there will be *real* opposition. That is what is happening here. In Verse 12 we read about signs and wonders; in Verse 15 sick people are being healed; in verse 16, the afflicted are being made well, and then in Verse 17 we see how people reacted. "*But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy*"

The High Priest and the Sadducees rise up. There's irony here, because remember: Sadducees don't believe anything, not the Resurrection, not angels, *nothing* Spiritual. And I'm jumping ahead of myself but in Verse 19, God sends the angel of the Lord to perform a miracle. "*But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out,*" It is so ironic: God sends something they don't believe in to do something they can't say happened and, when this happens, there is *real* opposition. Look what the Sadducees did in Verse 18: they arrested the Apostles (all the Apostles) and put them in the public prison-- the word is "democia" from which we get the word "democracy." These are common people in a public prison, common criminals for all the world to see. So if you are living as a Christian, then it is good for you to be aware of the opposition which comes in several forms:

**Spiritual Opposition** – It's the Sadducees in Verses 17 & 18 who want to quiet the believers. There are significant doctrinal differences. In Acts 4 we learned that the Sadducees were annoyed because the Apostles were preaching the Resurrection from the Dead. That is a basic Christian doctrine. Brothers and Sisters, we live in a day and time when, if you believe basic Christian Doctrine, you will face *real* opposition. I don't mean some radical fringe extremism – that's esoteric. Try it. Say out loud somewhere the phrase that "Without Christ people go to Hell." Watch what happens. Take, for instance, Chick-fil-A, owned by a Christian family that seeks to live its faith and to conduct business likewise. They've been banned from the airport in Denver Colorado because of their stated basic Christian beliefs.

**Emotional Opposition** – These solid Christian men who love Jesus and are seeking to honor him have been thrown into a very public jail. They are being treated like common criminals for living "Christian-ly." They, like some of you, are being ostracized, slandered and avoided. Even when you are in the right, the opposition against you is designed to discredit your competence and call into question your character.

What do we do?

**Decide that Christ is enough for you.** He is your passion and purpose. He is your goal and celebration. We embrace the first truth of the catechism, which asks: What is the chief end of man? And which answers: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

**Decide in Christ you're gladly immortal.** Everyone is immortal – some just spend eternity in Hell. In Christ, you are *gladly* immortal. We hold to the truth that Paul spoke in II Corinthians 4:17: "*This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of Glory – beyond all comparison.*" Accept that what you are facing now-- for a short time-- doesn't compare to the billions of years of the eternal weight of Glory waiting for God's children. That's why we don't grieve as those who have no hope. We grieve as those in Christ, and Christ is enough.

Brothers and sisters, being a Christian means *real* opposition and learning how to live in it.

## Being a Christian Means Purposeful Deliverance

My phraseology is intentional. When you are a Christian and God delivers you out of something, He does so with a very specific Christ-centered purpose.

Notice how beautiful this deliverance is and notice how Christ-centered it is. Let's start with Verse 8 and read to the end of Verse 21a. **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.* The Apostles were released miraculously for a very specific purpose. In Verse 20 they are instructed to "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." There is a singular unswerving emphasis on Christ all packed into Verse 20: first, "Go and stand" is an imperative to "go back to where you were arrested with dogged steadfastness." "Stand" means to hold your ground, stand firm. . Second, they are to be in the temple where all the people are. There is a very *public* feel to our faith. Third, they are told to "...speak to the people all the words of this life." This means the full counsel of God's word, the fully ordered message of Christ called "this life" in the text.

Life – Jesus identified himself as life. In John 6:35 Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall not thirst." He meets the deepest needs, fills the greatest voids, heals the most severe wounds and calms the profoundest fears.

Jesus said in John 10:10: *"The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* As a Christian, when you are delivered from something terrible such as a car wreck, a broken home, abuse, disease, or addictions, you are delivered with a purpose (which is not merely your well-being). Your well-being is not purpose is Christ! It's beautiful when God delivers but – I agree with John Piper - it's also beautiful when He *doesn't* deliver.

What do we do when he doesn't deliver? When the job doesn't work out or the marriage doesn't survive or the child doesn't live...what do we do then? When you pray and pray and seek and beg and the healing doesn't come? In the text, Acts 5, all the Apostles are in jail and God delivers them from harm this time. God delivered this time but in Chapter 7, God *doesn't* save Stephen. In Chapter 12, Peter and James are arrested. The church prayed, Peter was set free but James was killed by Herod. Sometimes God delivered Paul, sometimes he was shipwrecked and thrown in prison. Sometimes God broke him out of jail, sometimes he was beaten and stoned and abused.

Whether it's deliverance or suffering, for a Christian, both have great purpose. Deliverance from suffering shows the *power of God* to an unbelieving world. Deliverance through suffering (the death of James & Stephen) shows that all the words of this life were true, that to live *really* is Christ and to die *really* is gain.

In this story the Apostles were released miraculously for a very specific purpose: to speak all the words of this life. This life, Jesus, is so precious, His love is so good, His forgiveness is so real and His grace is so captivating that in Christ you can learn to say (together with Job), “Though he slay me yet will I hope in Him.” because for me to live is Christ and to die is gain, and I receive either with trust in Christ. My life is in His hands. That’s the tipping point: you placing-- consciously handing over-- your life and placing it (by faith in Jesus) in His hands.

That’s what I am asking you to do today at the cross, crucified with Christ. It is no longer we who live but Christ who lives in us. We live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Yes, indeed, all of life is different when you follow Christ.

*(Pastor Prays)*