

Lesson 5: In the Face of Opposition

Acts 5:17-42

The believers in Jerusalem were unified. They feared the Lord. They witnessed great signs and wonders. They were “held in high esteem” (Acts 5:13) by many in Jerusalem. In the midst of all that glory, however, we will see that the believers were facing increasing persecution from the authorities.

“And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

Acts 5:42

Sometimes we can sit squarely in the will of God, obeying Him as best we know how, and still face opposition. It may come in the form of persecution. It may be failing health. It may be the degrading comment of a loved one. Read the memory verse in the margin and pray that the Lord would equip you this week with the perseverance that he gave the early believers – to “keep right on” doing what He has called you to do.

The Disciples Arrested

Read Acts 5:17-26.

1. What motivated the high priest and the Sadducees when they arrested the apostles in Acts 5:17-18?
2. Who freed the apostles, and what did he instruct them to do (Acts 5:19-20)?
3. How did the apostles respond to the angel in Acts 5:21, and what does that show you about their faith?

One reason I’m loving the book of Acts is that it gives us glimpses into the lives of the men who later penned letters that would become our Holy Scriptures. Their words take on greater significance as we realize they were not written in a vacuum but by men who were very much

alive – men whose skin bruised purple and whose pores seeped sweat. John was one of the apostles who was arrested and then miraculously freed in this chapter of Acts.

Read John's words in John 1:14-15 and 1 John 1:1-4.

4. Who is the Word according to John 1:14-15?

5. How does John describe the Word of Life in 1 John 1:1-4?

6. How have you experienced the things John spoke of in your own life?

As John and the disciples experienced the eternal life that proceeded from Christ – the Word of Life, they were compelled to invite others into that fellowship and joy.

7. In Acts 5:21-26, how did the officers respond when the apostles were not found in the prison but were instead back in the Temple teaching the Word of God?

8. Imagine the scene of this second arrest. How do you think the officers acted? How do you imagine the apostles responded?

The Apostles Before the Council

Read Acts 5:27-40. All of the apostles now find themselves before the council, where Peter and John had been just weeks before (Acts 4:5-22).

9. Looking back to Acts 4:19 and at 5:28-29, how had the apostles decided to proceed in light of the council's instructions to Peter and John? Why?

10. Read 1 Peter 2:13-17. How did Peter instruct believers to live with regard to civil authorities? What about with regard to God?

11. How sure must the apostles have been that they were in fact doing the will of God?
Consider the events of Acts 5:19-20.

12. How do you see the apostles balancing their submission to God and civil authorities in Acts 4-5? (See especially 4:19-20, 5:26 and 5:29.) How might we follow their example?

Although the apostles decided to engage in civil disobedience, they still respected their authorities by willingly submitting to punishment. May we each find the grace and humility to live in obedience to God in a way that honors and submits to human authorities.

13. What did the council accuse the apostles of trying to do at the end of Acts 5:28? How is that ironic in light of the people's reaction to Pilate's offer to free Jesus in Matthew 27:24-26?

14. In Acts 5:30, the apostles continue to pin the death of Christ on the council. What did the apostles tell the council that God exalted Christ to do for Israel in Acts 5:31-32?

15. From John 3:16-17, how do the apostles' words to the council line up with the purposes of Christ? What do you think the apostles desired even for the men who had arrested them?

16. How did the council respond to the apostles' testimony according to Acts 5:33?

17. Who interceded on behalf of the apostles, and what was the logic behind his argument in Acts 5:34-39?

18. How has history tested and proved Gamaliel's reasoning with regard to Jesus Christ and His followers?

19. In Acts 5:40, how did the council's response to the apostles' teaching intensify from Acts 4:21?

The Apostles' Response

Read Acts 5:41-42.

20. How did the apostles respond to the harsh treatment of the council?
21. Look at Peter's words in 1 Peter 4:12-19. When are we to rejoice in suffering? What does that look like according to Peter?

I wonder if Peter traced a scar on his arm as he wrote those words. Did he rub his back, remembering the leather strips that had struck his flesh? Surely he considered his words before he wrote them. He knew what it meant to suffer for Christ.

22. How do you think suffering and persecution can be used positively in the lives of believers?

Prepare for Life

When these believers were certain they were in the will of God, nothing could stop them. They endured suffering with joy. They persevered through trials. They "kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

23. What do you think would have been different if they had not been convinced that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the very Son of God, and that He had called and empowered them to be His witnesses?
24. How certain are you that Jesus is who He says He is? If you aren't certain, you may want to spend some time reading through the Appendix: The Plan of Salvation. You may want to ask your small group leader some questions. You may want to take this chance and pray to the God you're still not sure of – asking Him to reveal Himself more clearly to you.

25. If you are certain of Christ's identity, how do you sense that He is calling you to be His witness? It may not be a big or public thing. Ask Him to show you specifically where you can be His witness in your own life. Take some time to come before Him and ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon you and enable you do what He has called you to do.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 5