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The Church Fully Emerges

Acts 5:12-47

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: In this extensive passage we see how God begins to separate the Church away from Israel and Judaism specifically. Through increased pressure and threats God is preparing the Church to obey Jesus' commands to bring the gospel to Judea, Samaria and even the ends of the earth.

I. Introduction.

- A. Review of Acts 5:1-11.
 - 1. Wonderful growth but sin in the church.
 - 2. God deals with it in a very serious manner that is shocking the first time you read it.
 - 3. The purpose and result is found in vs 11. Whatever the people thought it was going to be like to be a Christian, this changed everything.
 - 4. And now we move into a large passage that really functions as one whole unite (Read vss 12-47).
- B. We have in this extensive passage three scenes: 13-16, 17-26 and 27-47.
 - 1. Why these stories? Why did Luke decide that these were important enough to give such a large amount of valuable space to describe them?
 - 2. The answer is very simple, but also very important. He is showing the final breakout of the Church from under the shadow of Judaism. This can be easily missed as we see miracles, arrests and beatings in this section.
- C. The nature of the Church in relation to Israel.
 - 1. It is important to keep these two entities separate as the bible does. I did a sermon on the beginning of the Church as well as a F&F podcast if you are unsure of this whole subject.
 - 2. Often you will find people conflating Israel with the Church and it leads to several problems. Usually there is a replacing of Israel with the Church.
 - a. It is NOT the "true" Israel. Or it is simply the "new" Israel.

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- b. When this is done it radically changes how the Old Testament is read and understood. The many promises of God restoring Israel and saving Israel are changed from actual promises made to the nation to spiritual promises made to the Church.
 - c. It results in Christians looking at the way the nation of Israel was to live in the Old Testament and trying to replicate it in some way or another.
 - d. However, never in the New Testament do we find the Church being referred to as Israel. But this does not keep it from happening in our minds over and over.
3. This challenge is also seen in how you read and approach the gospels.
- a. How often do you read the gospels with the idea that the whole of the Old Testament was in force. That Jesus was expected to obey all of those commandments? That the Temple and all of its sacrifices were to be done?
 - b. Do you look at the disciples and think that they somehow didn't go to make sacrifices at the Temple anymore after they believed in Jesus in the gospels? This is not true.
 - c. The entire life of a Jew was in the shadow of Israel and Judaism.
 - d. Remember how Jesus praised the widow who gave to the Temple out of her poverty? Or how Jesus rebukes the Pharisees because they tithed their mint and dill and cummin but neglected what He called the "weightier provisions of the law" (Matt 23:23). But then He says this, "But these are the things (justice and mercy and faithfulness) you should have done **without** neglecting the others.
- D. Remember that Acts functions like a transitional book where Jesus ascends to heaven and the Church is born in Jerusalem by the coming of the Holy Spirit. From there it is shown to move outward from Jerusalem and into the rest of the world.
1. Up to now the early Church is fixed within Jerusalem.
 2. But Jesus said in 1:8, ". . . you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."
 3. Right now everything is fine right here in Jerusalem. The Church is growing by leaps and bounds; exciting events are taking place, why go outward into the rest of the world?

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4. And so in very quick fashion God brings about some key events that essentially hurl the Church outward in obedience to the call to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.
- E. We will take this passage in three sections and simply work our way through it as we watch the Church emerge.

II. The Church Fully Emerges.

- A. The Apostolic work of miraculous mercy (12-16).
 1. The Apostles continued to center their work at the Temple grounds. The porch mentioned went around the outside of the grounds. The present-day wailing wall is the outside of part of that structure.
 2. It is important to note that the work of miracles and casting out of demons was the work of the Apostles. This was not part of a average believer and there is no reason to think that it is any more normal today.
 3. People were coming from all over to receive relief.
 - a. COVID has revealed how much people fear death in America. But it has also revealed how death is something we are not as well acquainted with as we like to think.
 - b. The average life-span in the days of Acts would be around 40-50. Anyone beyond that was very unique and often held in high esteem.
 - c. Infant mortality rates would have been around 25%. So one out of four would live past one year. And to make it past your 20's was no easy task. **Death was a daily part of your life in those days.**
 - d. You can understand the stir that they created and why people held them in high esteem (13).
 - e. You even see how some even thought Peter's shadow would heal them. No evidence this is true, but it does tell you how desperate people were for relief.
 4. But never was the work of miracles the purpose of the Apostle's work. It was a side activity that was designed to affirm their authority. I would ask you to go back and review my sermon Apostolic Authority in Action (9/5/21).
 5. Understand that the primary task was always for them to function as witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their central

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ministry was always word-based, not miracle-based. And this continues to this day.

6. Notice the fear and trepidation that was present in spite of these wonderful events (11-13). To track who is who is rather a challenge.
 - a. We have “apostles” and “the people” and “they were all” in vs 12.
 - b. Then “none of the rest” and “them” and “the people” and one more “them” in vs 13.
 - c. If you would like, you may want to lightly circle and draw connecting lines to the groups to keep them straight.
 - (1) “Apostles” connects with “they were all” and “them” (twice) in vs 13.
 - (2) “the people” in 12 connects with “the people” in 13.
 - (3) “none of the rest” is either the average believer or Jews who were not intrigued by what was happening.
 - d. What is likely happening is that with the first arrest of Peter and John and the command to not preach in the name of Jesus, many in the Church withdrew from the public part of the early Church’s activities. Why create unnecessary trouble and risk against the Jewish leadership?
 - (1) But the Apostles continued in their God-given task of proclaiming that Jesus is the risen Messiah.
 - (2) And the general populace continued to come to the Temple and as they witnessed these miracles they were eager to come and receive healing and deliverance.
 - (3) And so the gospel continued to do its work. And the excitement and joy connected to the Apostles rose to almost a fever pitch according to vss 15-16. This was Jesus’ earthly ministry all over again.
- B. The Reaction of The So-Called Shepherds of Israel (17-26).
1. Now we see the persecution of the church move up to a new level. The apostles and the church were growing in popularity and this was not acceptable so the Sanhedrin decided to act.
 - a. Remember that the Sanhedrin is also know as the “Council” which was the senate and supreme court of Israel. It consisted of the high

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priest, who served as its presiding officer, and 70 other men. Its aristocratic members, the majority, were Sadducees, and its lay leaders were Pharisees. Along with them there would be others involved in a lesser capacity. The High Priest would always be a Sadducee for they were all part of the Levitical priesthood. Pharisees were not.

- b. Notice Luke says in vs 17 the “sect” of the Sadducees (ESV says “party”). This is more important than you might understand.
 - (1) Judaism was a large entity made up of many smaller groups of people. The Sadducees (the Orthodox), Pharisees (the liberals) and Essenes (the mystics) are three major examples; you could add Zealots (the nationalists) to the groups too. They tended to have their place in Judaism and it was similar to the denominations today in the Protestant Church.
 - (2) Well the Church is functioning like a sect within Judaism right now in Acts. It is rapidly growing and this is creating real problems in the minds of those in power.
 - (3) Remember how many times we have seen that part of the message of the Apostles is the Jesus is the “Christ.” He was murdered by the Jews, God raised Him from the dead and the Apostles then called (3:19-20) on the nation as a whole to repent so that Christ would return and set all things new.
 - (4) So the Apostles were not breaking out from under Judaism. They were not seeing themselves as rebels, but rather, as restorers.
 - (5) But the Church was not designed to be this. And through these events we are reading, God is preparing to break the Church out from the womb of Judaism and move it out onto its own.
 - c. And God is going to use the sin of the religious leaders to do this very thing.
2. Vs 17, note they were filled with jealousy
- a. The church was filled with the Spirit, Ananias and Sapphira were filled with greed, and the Sanhedrin are filled with jealousy.
 - b. Why? It has to do with honor.

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- (1) This is an honor/shame culture and we don't easily understand this as Americans.
 - (2) Realize that honor is a commodity and there is only so much to go around. You are born into a certain status and honor that comes from your parentage and lineage. In caste societies, the higher the class you belong to the more honor is yours.
 - (3) In Israel's case you have the Sanhedrin functioning at the highest levels of honor. Uneducated fishermen, former tax-gatherers and such would be much, much lower.
 - (4) But who are the crowds coming to see? Not the Sanhedrin.
- c. The Council is made up of the shepherds of Israel. But they are the false shepherds that the prophets all rebuked and warned about.
- (1) "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. (Jer. 23:1)
 - (2) Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And clever in their own sight! Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine, And valiant men in mixing strong drink; who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right! (Isa. 5:20-23)
 - (3) "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?" "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. (Ezek. 34:2-4)
 - (4) These were men who only loved themselves and their honor.

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- (a) They had no time for Jesus for it would require them to repent of their love of power, honor and riches. They had no time for the Apostles for the same would be true.
 - (b) And they cared not for the poor, suffering people. This council had no power to heal and no ability to bring solace and hope to the people.
- 3. Vs 18, now all of the apostles are arrested. They went for the leaders to silence them.
 - a. Notice that it is a “public” jail.
 - b. Why? One, for intimidation factor. Two, to show to the people who is the boss and what is proper and orthodox. Three, public humiliation.
- 4. Vss 19-26.
 - a. This is where the public nature of the arrest becomes ironic.
 - b. In a casual way we learn of an angel coming and releasing them with the command to preach in the Temple. And by doing it this way it emphasizes the helplessness of the Sanhedrin.
 - c. It also is so different than how we see the many false teachers today who emphasize the supernatural in healings and prophecies and miracles. For them, it is a huge program, for the bible, it is a casual side note.
 - d. But notice also the command of the angel in vs 20. “This life” is simply speaking of Jesus—who He is and what He has done.
 - e. Again, casual. It isn’t to go out and talk it up about the angelic intervention. Rather, it is to go back and keep on preaching Jesus. Remember, the Christian faith is always and ever a Word-based faith.
 - f. The way vss 21-25 is written shows that helplessness of the religious leaders.
 - (1) The Apostles are back and are preaching in the temple. The Sanhedrin solemnly gather to deal with the jailed men.
 - (2) No one can find them. And then someone see them out preaching. Very embarrassing.

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- g. Vs 24 is enlightening. What is the main concern of the Sanhedrin?
 - (1) It seems to point to their reputation. What is going to happen as a result of them getting free and preaching again.
 - (2) The people know these men were imprisoned yet now they are out and preaching again. Again, very embarrassing and like all politicians, it is something to be managed.
 - (3) Understand again that the Sadducees do not believe in divine intervention much so this is even more concerning for them. They really don't know what to make of this whole mess.
- h. In vs 26, how the captain of the guard himself went to the Apostles to bring them back. This shows how much the people loved the Apostles.
 - (1) "without violence" means that they spoke respectfully and softly to the Apostles.
 - (2) They were afraid for their own lives at this point if they roughed up these men.
- C. The split continues to widen (27-47).
 - 1. Now they are all formally charged that they violated the high priest's order.
 - a. The charges are that they continued to preach in Jesus' name.
 - b. They were also accused of trying to make the Sanhedrin guilty of Jesus' death.
 - (1) The meaning of bringing a person blood on someone is an Old Testament idea of making them responsible for murder. This would then make them bloodguilty and their blood was to be shed.
 - (2) However only a few weeks earlier they had said to Pilate, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 27:25).
 - (3) What is really sad though is that all the Apostles wanted was that all, including the Sanhedrin, to repent to be saved, not killed.

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- c. But there is also something in this questioning that is missing that is a bit humorous. Not a single question on how they escaped from prison. They just pretend that part didn't happen.
2. Peter's response in vs 29ff is simply a restatement of their message.
 - a. Understand the statement "we must obey God rather than men" is not a *carte blanche* statement. It is restricted here to the fact that Jesus Christ clearly commanded the Apostles to be His witnesses and the leadership is seeking to silence them.
 - (1) Jesus was the Messiah, raised up for Israel by God.
 - (2) You put him on the cross. And in saying this he accepts the charge the Council is making that the Apostles are putting the blood of Christ on their hands.
 - (3) God raised him from the dead, exalting him as prince and savior, to bring repentance and forgiveness of sin to Israel.
 - b. Vs 32 is the one that brings thing to the head. Why?
 - (1) They equate their witness as being also the Holy Spirit's.
 - (2) And that they have the Holy Spirit (part of the New Covenant) while the Sanhedrin know they don't.
 - (3) Finally, they have the Spirit because they obey God, implying that the Sanhedrin don't.
3. Vss 33-34.
 - a. The anger directed to the Apostles was likely by the Sadducees who were in majority in the Sanhedrin. They wanted death.
 - b. This is where a man named Gamaliel steps into the story.
 - (1) He is an impressive person in biblical history. As a Pharisee he is in the minority on the Council. As an aside, Paul was a disciple of his.
 - (2) But he is also respected by all. He orders the room to be emptied of everyone but the Council.
4. Vss 35-39 Gamaliel's defense.
 - a. Ironic how a Pharisee is the one to defend them since in Luke they are focused by Jesus with so much rebukes. The reason is in Luke

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Jesus is among the common people and in Acts they are in Jerusalem.

- (1) As mentioned previously, the Pharisees were the minority party in the Sanhedrin, though there were more than 6,000 of them in Israel at this time. They were, notwithstanding, far more influential with the masses than the Sadducees were. The Pharisees looked for a personal Messiah. They believed in the resurrection of the dead and the existence and activity of angels and demons. They tried to live a simple life in contrast to the Sadducees' luxurious living. They considered themselves to be separated to holiness and dedicated entirely to God. Most of the scribes, the Bible expositors of that day, were Pharisees.
 - (2) “In short, theologically the Christian Jews had a lot more in common with the Pharisees than they did with the Sadducees.” (Witherington, 294)
- b. Gamaliel first gives a word of caution to slow down.
- c. Then a brief history lesson on other religious movements
- (1) We don't know anything about Theudas. There is one mentioned by Josephus but that was much later date.
 - (2) Judas was probably a Zealot. Barclay says this of him, “Judas was a fanatic who took up the position that God was the King of Israel; to Him alone tribute was due; and that all other taxation was impious and to pay it was a blasphemy.” He was killed and his followers quickly scattered.
 - (3) What is the actual point Gamaliel is making?
 - (a) They died and the movements could not go on. For the Sadducees, they would hear about the leader dying and it would appeal to them since they rejected the idea that Jesus was raised from the dead.
 - (b) Therefore, if Jesus had died, and was still dead, then the movement would not succeed without their leader.

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- d. Finally advice to leave them alone, if God was moving in it there is nothing they could do and they would be fighting God and if He wasn't it would fizzle out.
- e. Whether he was aware of it or not, he makes a key point in all of this. Is the Church some false movement or is it true? Only time would tell. But if God is doing this, then nothing will stop it.
 - (1) And 2,000 years of history shows this to be true.
 - (2) Starting here in the early part of Acts all the way to nations like Afghanistan and North Korea the gospel is still being preached.
 - (3) The message is watered in the blood of those who must obey God rather than men.
 - (4) Through the many heresies and false teachers the truth continues to be read, preached and heard. Though sorely pressed on every side the Church remains.
 - (5) Why? Because its Head is Jesus Christ, the One who died for our sin and rose again. The Church is vitally and eternally connected to His life-giving presence.
 - (6) He is, as Peter says in our passage, our Prince and Savior. What can man do to Him?

III. Conclusion.

- A. In vs 40-42 Luke sums it all up now.
 - 1. The Council take the advice of Gamaliel.
 - 2. But they also have to assert their authority, so they have the men beaten.
 - 3. The flogging would have been according to the Law, 39 lashes. The reason was that they did not obey the command to not preach.
- B. The Apostles, though, reacted uniquely.
 - 1. Rejoicing that they had suffered because of Jesus' name.
 - 2. Jesus had predicted that people would hate and persecute His disciples and had told them to rejoice in these responses (Matt. 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23). Peter later wrote that Christians should count it a privilege to suffer for Christ's sake (1 Pet. 4:13; cf. 2:18-21; 3:8-17).
- C. So even here we see them obeying God rather than men.

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1. The beating would have been hard and painful. None of us here has endured even something close to that.
2. But they had a choice. Be filled with dread, be filled with hate and bitterness or be filled with self-pity? Or obey their Lord.
3. And so with great rejoicing they continued with their message—Jesus was the messiah. He who died also rose again. Repent, believe and be saved.
4. As the writer of Hebrews says of those faith-filled men and women in the Old Testament who believed God, “. . . *others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground*” (Hebrews 11:36-38)

Benediction

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. May you rest in the power of the Holy Spirit and may you rejoice in the love of the Father as it flows to you in every moment and in every way. Amen.