

# Crazy Joy (Part 1): Joy in Spite of Suffering?!

---

## Introduction

### Jumping Back In

- A. We're going to talk about joy this morning. It doesn't really show up until [v. 41](#) of our text here, but you kind of need the whole story to see it rightly. Set in its context, it's just stunning.
- B. So let's read back up from [Acts 5:17-42](#).
  - 1. Remember, at this point Jesus has died, risen, and ascended ([Acts 1](#)).
  - 2. He's poured his Spirit out upon his disciples, which gets the whole engine of the Christian church roaring ([Acts 2-3](#)).
  - 3. They've experienced opposition already from the Jewish religious leaders there in Jerusalem. Two of the apostles (Peter and John) had already been imprisoned and told not to speak or teach anymore in Jesus' name, but they didn't alter course in the slightest. They kept right at it ([Acts 4](#)).
  - 4. And so here come those same religious authorities once again, this time with even more vehemence, as you might expect . . .

### The Text

<sup>17</sup> But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy <sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. <sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup> "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, <sup>23</sup> "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." <sup>24</sup> Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. <sup>25</sup> And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." <sup>26</sup> Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

<sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

<sup>33</sup> When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. <sup>34</sup> 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 outside for a little while. <sup>35</sup> And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to

do with these men.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.<sup>38</sup> 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;<sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice,<sup>40</sup> and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.<sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.<sup>42</sup> And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Acts 5:17–42)

## Life . . . Light . . . Joy!

- A. This is our second week dealing with this text. And last time, you may recall, I brought out three themes for us to consider: Life, Light, and Joy.
1. Regarding life, we focused in on [v. 20](#) there where the angel encourages the apostles to go and preach the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which he here refers to as “[all the words of this Life](#).”
    - a. Jesus has died for the sins of the world. And he’s now risen up for their salvation and eternal life. “Go tell it on the mountain!”
  2. Regarding light, I brought your attention to [v. 21](#), where we’re told that these apostles begin preaching all the words of this life “[at daybreak](#)”—at early dawn.
    - a. At one level, I understand, it’s just the time of day.
    - b. At a deeper level, however, I think it’s a powerful metaphor reminding us that—with Jesus’ resurrection, with his incorruptible life—a new day has dawned. Light is streaming in!
      - i. And, as I said, some will pull the curtains tighter and deadbolt the doors. They’d rather nurse their sins in the darkness than find healing in the light.
      - ii. But others, they’re opening up to him and, not only are they finding healing in the light, they’re finding . . . joy!
  3. That’s where these apostles are. That’s what we see there in [v. 41](#), one of the most amazing verses in all the New Testament so far as I can tell.
    - a. After being beaten or scourged (likely referring to the customary 39 lashes Jews would give for serious offenses) and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus ([v. 40](#)), Luke tells us this: “[Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name](#).” And they “[did not cease teaching and preaching](#)” in the name of Jesus ([vv. 41-42](#)).
- B. I only touched at the surface of [v. 41](#) last time. But I am telling you: there’s an ocean filled with wonder underneath these words. And I want to do a deep dive into it with you.

1. So, Lord willing, this is where we're going to focus for this week and next.

## What Is the Deal with This Joy?

- A. I just want to know: What is the deal with this joy? It's crazy. Are they crazy? Can we even make any sense of this?
  1. You have your life upended; you have the most powerful and influential of your countrymen now against you; you're beaten to within an inch of your life, and hearing threats that they'll go all the way if there ever is a repeated offense . . . and yet you go on your way from all that rejoicing?!
    - a. Let me put it this way: These guys are either insane or they have discovered the secret to everlasting joy. These guys are either masochistic maniacs or they hold in their hands the key that unlocks the very treasure chest we're all trying to open this morning.
- B. Because here's what I know about you, without even really having to know you at all: you want joy. You do what you do because you're chasing after joy.
  1. As Blaise Pascal has famously said: "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."
- C. Search your heart. Isn't this true? You do what you do because you're looking for joy.
  1. It's why some of you go to work. It's why others of you dream about quitting work.
  2. It's why some of you want to get married. It's why others of you wish you could get out of your marriage.
  3. It's why some of you want to have kids. It's why others of you wouldn't dare have kids.
  4. It's why some of you go to the gym. It's why others of you don't go to the gym—you just stay in your comfort zone with your bag of Funyuns on the couch.
  5. It's why you go to the mall.
  6. It's why you go to the beach.
  7. It's why you go to the mountains.
  8. It's why you turn on the TV.
  9. It's why you turn to the bottle.
  10. It's why you spin that gossip, even though you know it's not the full truth.
  11. It's why you spend that money, even though you know you don't have it.
  12. It's why you click on that link, even though you know you shouldn't.
  - a. I want joy. We all want joy.
- D. And these apostles seem to have it . . .

1. Not just momentarily—not just for a brief bit of time before it slips through your fingers and gives way to grief or anxiety or despondency or whatever. We all can get that. We all get little tantalizing tastes of it, but it’s so quickly lost on us.
  2. No, no! They have it and it seems to be untouchable, imperturbable, everlasting.
- E. How? Where does such a thing come from? How do we get in on it? Can we even? It’s a crazy joy. And I want it. And I want you to have it.

## “Crazy Joy”

- A. Now, I say this joy is “crazy” in particular because of the relation of it to suffering. Think about it . . .
1. If these guys had just won the lottery or something, and after picking up their prize they went on their way rejoicing . . .
  2. or if these guys had just found out they were to be receiving some big promotion at work, and so after talking with their boss they went on their way rejoicing . . .
  3. or if they were diehard football fans and their team had just won the Superbowl, and as they were coming out of the stadium they went on their way rejoicing . . .
    - a. . . . no one would call this joy crazy. It’s just normal.
  4. What makes the joy of these apostles here crazy joy is its relationship to suffering: “<sup>40</sup> and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.<sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (vv. 40-41).
    - a. That’s insane. Everything is going wrong. It couldn’t get worse. And somewhere deep down, underneath blood and bruises, you’re still happy. That’s what makes it crazy.
- B. So here’s what I want to do. I want to try to show you where this crazy kind of joy comes from by considering it in relation to suffering in particular:
1. This morning I want you to see why and how we can have joy in spite of suffering.
  2. Next week, it’s going to get even crazier, because I want you to see why and how we can have joy, not just in spite of suffering, but actually in light of it.
    - a. Because that’s what I read here: They don’t just rejoice even though they were suffering for Jesus. They actually rejoice because they were suffering for Jesus: “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”
- C. But for today it’s: Joy in spite of suffering.
1. I’m going to give you two reasons now, why, with Jesus, we can have joy in spite of suffering: Reason #1: Because God Is Still in Control; Reason #2: Because God Is Still up to Good.
- D. I should say before we begin here:

1. I recognize that the suffering these apostles are dealing with in our text is specifically the suffering of persecution as a result of their association with Jesus.
2. But, while I will discuss this particular type of suffering in these two sermons, I'm really going to widen the lens a bit and discuss suffering in general, suffering on the whole—because I think all the reasons I'll bring out for why we can have joy in spite and in light of suffering are still true even in this broader sense as well.
  - a. And, therefore, hopefully these sermons will be more widely applicable to all of us whatever kind of suffering we come in here dealing with this morning.

## Reason #1: Because God Is Still in Control

### Is God Asleep at the Wheel?

- A. One of the things that often makes suffering so unbearable for us, I think, is this sense that things are out of control. It feels like the floor is just falling out from under us and we're going down. It feels like God has fallen asleep at the wheel. Like maybe the devil has gotten the upper hand. Why else would this be happening to me?!
  1. That's how it feels, right? He's not in control. And, therefore, you don't have joy. You have things like anxiety and anger and despondency and dread.
- B. But, listen, no matter how rough it gets, no matter how dark, God is still in control. He's got the wheel. He's not asleep. As the psalmist says: "[H]e who keeps you will not slumber" (Ps. 121:3).

### Acts 5: Gamaliel's Speech

- A. I want to make a case for this from our text back in [Acts 5](#).
  1. It's very interesting, Gamaliel, a guy technically on the side of those opposing the apostles, he gets it. This is the essential point of his little speech there in [vv. 35-39](#).
- B. Remember the context . . .
  1. The Jewish leaders here are concerned about the upswell of these followers of Jesus. Luke had just told us back up in [Acts 5:14](#) that, in spite of their previous warnings and threats, now "[more than ever believers were \[being\] added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women . . .](#)"
  2. It's growing, and, understandably then, so also is their concern. When it seemed just a little spot fire they weren't all that worried about it, but now it's a full on forest fire and they feel a corresponding sense of urgency: we've got to put this thing out . . . now!
  3. They want to kill these trouble-making apostles. They're tired of dealing with them. They're a threat to their power and position.
- C. But Gamaliel—one of the most prominent rabbis of his day, a Pharisee, a wise man who knew the Law of God—he speaks up, encouraging them to pause and think a bit before they act. And here's what he says: "<sup>35</sup> [Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.](#) <sup>36</sup> [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.<sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.<sup>38</sup> 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;<sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!”

D. You see what he’s doing here, don’t you? He draws out a lesson for this council to consider from two somewhat recent and similar incidents.

1. Since the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C. I guess the Jewish historian Josephus tells us Palestine was awash with revolutionaries and people stirring up trouble trying to buck up against Rome and all this. And these two men [Theudas](#) and [Judas the Galilean](#) appear to have been in the number.
2. But by recounting these two stories he’s getting at a singular point:
  - a. You see, in both cases, while it seemed these men were at the start of something big and threatening, when once the founder died, so too did the movement. And it all came to nothing.
  - b. So, again, therefore, he concludes: “<sup>38</sup> [\[K\]eep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail;](#) <sup>39</sup> [but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!](#)”
    - i. If I could put his point as sharply as I’m able, here’s what he’s saying: If this Jesus movement is not from God, you won’t ultimately need to stop it (it will go out on its own in the end). But if it is from God, you won’t ultimately be able to stop it (and he will run you over if you try).

E. Gamaliel, “[a teacher of the law](#)” (v. 34), knows the law. And, as such he knows God is ultimately in control of all things.

1. He knows the words of Solomon in [Prov. 21:30](#): “[No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD.](#)”
2. He knows the words of the prophet in [Lam. 3:37](#): “[Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?](#)”
3. He knows the words of Abijah as he’s crying out for the people of Israel to repent of their idolatry: in [2 Chr. 13:12](#): “[O sons of Israel, do not fight against the LORD, the God of your fathers, for you cannot succeed.](#)”
4. He knows the words of the psalmist in [Ps. 115:3](#): “[Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.](#)”
5. He knows those words of Nebuchadnezzar in [Dan. 4:35](#): “[\[The Most High\] does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’](#)”

F. It’s interesting, later in Acts we learn from Paul that he himself was actually a student under Gamaliel ([Acts 22:3](#)). But Paul, evidently, disagreed with him on this point.

1. For, while the council here in [Acts 5](#) “[took his advice](#)” (v. 39) . . .

2. . . . Paul clearly doesn't.
  - a. We'll see him coming at the church in the next chapters, trying to kill, trying to stop it—"breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1).
  - b. But do you remember what happens on the Damascus road? Do you remember what Jesus says to him? He knocks Paul down on his face. And he says this: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14).
    - i. You say, "I don't understand. What's a goad?" It was a pointed stick that would serve the same purpose as a whip—used to move your animal in the direction you wanted it to go.
    - ii. So Jesus is saying, "You're like an animal kicking against the goads of his master. You're trying to go this way, I'm moving things that way . . . and we all know who is going to win."
      - (1) Paul doesn't defeat the church, he joins the church.
      - (2) From that moment on Paul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle.
  - c. So, interestingly enough, though Paul didn't initially hold to Gamaliel's view on this, his own life becomes a proof for it in the end.
    - i. If God is in something, you can't stop him. His purposes will stand.

## For Their Joy and Ours

- A. This is perhaps a roundabout way of getting at the point, but I think you see it.
  1. The principle is put more negatively by Gamaliel: We can't stop God.
  2. But these apostles understood what this meant for them in a more positive sense: God is in control.
    - a. He has the wheel. Even when people try to hurt us or oppose us or kill us, ultimately, they can't. Even when it seems like God has abandoned us, he's not.
      - i. One of the reasons we can have joy in Jesus, in spite of suffering, is that we know we have put our lives in God's hands and God's hands hold the world. He is still in control. I don't have to fret. He's got me.
- B. It may feel like your life has gone off the rails. Whatever the reason may be. You lost your job. You got a devastating diagnosis. Your marriage is a wreck. People in your life have turned on you. It's off the rails. That's how it feels.
  1. I don't want to downplay how it feels. It's painful. It's hard. It's okay to cry, to struggle.
  2. But I do want to say on the authority of God's Word, that such a thing is simply and profoundly untrue. He is still in control, however out of control it seems.

## A Rising Tension

- A. But now you sense the rising tension here, don't you.
  - 1. Okay, maybe he is still in control.
  - 2. But, if he is, why would he let all this happen? If he is still at the wheel, well aware of what's going on, why would he drive me down this back alley of suffering and sorrow in the first place?
    - a. He may have the wheel of my life, but he has it like a hijacker. He's got me hostage. He's got ill intent. He's taking the thing off a cliff for the sheer pleasure of it.
- B. I was reading for my devotions in [2 Kings](#) and the king of Israel is feeling something similar. Here's what he says: "[This trouble is from the LORD! Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?](#)" ([2 Kings 6:33](#)).
  - 1. In other words: "If the trouble I'm facing is, in some sense, from God because he's control of all things—why should I wait for or expect any help from him? I better figure this out myself. I'm on my own in this. He may be in control, but he's most certainly not up to good." Have you ever felt similar?
- C. You see, here is where, in your suffering, you're not so much questioning his hand anymore: "Is he active, is he strong, is he in control?"—now you're starting to question his heart: "Is he good, is he for me, he may be sovereign but is he kind?" Because, again, it doesn't feel like it.
  - 1. So Reason #1 is not enough to sustain our joy in suffering. We need Reason #2 . . .

## Reason #2: Because God Is Still up to Good

### Is God Against Me?

- A. Another thing that often makes suffering so unbearable, I think, is we start to question whether God is for us.
  - 1. The suffering itself is hard enough, even if you know God is for you and with you in it.
  - 2. How much worse is it when you imagine it to be a sure sign and evidence that God is actually against you? He wants me to hurt. He doesn't care. He's not still up to good in my life. Makes you want to go lights out, doesn't it? Just give up.
    - a. So you don't have joy. You have things like depression and resentment and panic.
- B. But, listen, no matter how rough it gets, no matter how dark, God is still in control, yes, and he is also still up to good in your life. Not only does he have the wheel . . . he's driving you somewhere incredible, if you'd just keep that belt on and, by faith, stay in your seat. It's going to be okay.



## Acts 5: “This Man’s Blood upon Us”

- A. I made a case for the first reason I gave you by drawing from our text back in [Acts 5](#) and I want to do the same for this second reason now as well.
  - 1. It’s really interesting. One of the ways we can be reassured that God is up to good with us, that he is for us and not against us, no matter how hard it gets, is we can look at how he treats even his enemies here (remembering that we too, without Christ, would be his enemies as well).
    - a. For this, I’m particularly interested in that little statement from the religious leaders there in [v. 28](#). It’s laced with irony and the gospel, actually. Let me show you what I mean . . .
- B. They’re frustrated with these apostles and they make this accusation against them: “[Y]ou intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”
  - 1. Now, what they mean by this statement is: “You’re blaming us for Jesus’ death. You’re saying we bear the guilt for what happened to him, and it’s stirring up the crowds against us. Stop it! You ‘intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’”
    - a. And, in this sense, it’s true. Many times over, the apostles have made the point: “You killed Jesus!” (cf. [Acts 3:15](#); [4:10](#); [5:30](#)). “His blood is on your hands.”
  - 2. But the words of [v. 28](#) are true in yet another sense, aren’t they? (And this is where things take a stunning turn!)
    - a. Because, you see, these apostles aren’t just intending to bring Jesus’ blood upon them as a way of establishing their guilt, they are also intending to bring Jesus’ blood upon them as a way of removing their guilt.
      - i. It’s true in both senses. There are two layers to this statement. One accents the guilt of man. The other accents the grace of God.
- C. That is what is so incredible to me. We are guilty of the blood of Jesus in our sin. And yet God takes the blood of Jesus and makes it the very means by which we are washed of our sin.
  - 1. Jesus doesn’t rise up from the dead and go on a rampage against those who put him to death (but who would’ve blamed him if he had). No!
  - 2. Instead, he rises up from the dead, and moves towards his enemies offering them in his blood-sacrifice a way of forgiveness and reconciliation and life.
    - a. The blood of Jesus is, at one and the same time, the grounds of my guilt and the means of my pardon.
      - i. In other words: I can point to the blood of Jesus and say: “I am guilty!”
      - ii. But I can also point to the blood of Jesus and say: “I am forgiven!”

(1) His blood was shed by me. And his blood was shed for me! Both are true. That's the gospel. That's amazing grace!

D. So do these apostles intend to bring Jesus' blood upon the religious leaders? Yes, in both senses.

1. Which is why Peter and the apostles respond to their accusation in vv. 30-31 and say: “<sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree [his blood as the grounds of our guilt]. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins [his blood as the means of our forgiveness].”

- a. Think about it. This is an invitation to those who shed the blood of Jesus that they come be washed by the same.
- b. God takes our most vilest deed (killing his beloved Son) and turns it for our salvation.
  - i. And we shouldn't be surprised. After all, you remember what Jesus cries out from the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). They are killing him. He is forgiving them. There is no love in all the world like this!

## For Their Joy and Ours

A. And here's why this matters for your joy . . .

1. If even when we were his bitter enemies, God still did not push away from us but instead he moved towards us, laid down his Son for us, and made way for our pardon; how much more, now that we have been pardoned, reconciled, made his friends through Jesus can we know that God is for us and up to good in our lives—whatever hardship we may currently be facing?!

- a. He's not abandoned you. He's not trying to hurt you. He loves you. He's for you. He's got you.

B. Those of you who know your Bibles, know I'm simply restating what Paul the apostle has already said in Rom. 5:8-11, listen: “<sup>8</sup> God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

C. And Paul continues to develop this train of thought until, at last, he ascends to the heights of Rom. 8 and declares from the mountaintop: “<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are

regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (vv. 31–39).

D. What is the upshot of all of this for us?

1. Again, because of Jesus, you can know: Not only is God in control, he is also up to good in your life, however hard it may be at the present moment.

a. And if he is in control and up to good, you can rejoice . . . even through tears—  
"sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," as Paul says (2 Cor. 6:10)

E. That's what these apostles knew. That's what they were preaching and teaching about. And that's why, even after being flogged for their faith, "they left the presence of the council, rejoicing . . ." (Acts 5:41).

## Conclusion

### How's Your Joy?

A. So how about you? How's your joy? We're all looking for it, but do we have it?

B. These apostles, their joy couldn't be touched because it's tethered to Jesus and he can't be touched.

1. He's overcome Satan, sin, and death for them. Nothing can separate them from his love.
2. Therefore, nothing can, ultimately, steal their joy.

C. But I wonder if you noticed: the emotional life of these Jewish leaders is also described in our text. And it's not so pretty.

1. They too are looking for a lasting joy, as we all are, but because they're looking for it in the wrong places, because they're not willing to find it in Jesus, they're actually, ironically, made all the more all the more miserable for it.

a. When you tether your joy to the things of this world, your joy will go up and down with it—it will be vulnerable to the moth, rust, and thieves that can get at the things of this world. So you'll never feel stable. You'll always be a little on edge.

i. And that's what we see with these men here. They're experiencing this mixed up cocktail of envy, panic, rage, and all this. Because they know they're always in danger of losing what they think will make them happy.

D. They thought sitting in the place of power and prominence would make them happy—where they're highly esteemed and well-respected among the people.

1. And maybe it did make them happy for a little while. It scratched the itch for a bit.

2. But it's so vulnerable. And along come these apostles with their message about Jesus, and their miraculous healings and all this, and they're threatened by it. Because the people are all following after them now and not us.
  - a. This is why we're told in [v. 17](#) that they were "filled with jealousy . . .". That's why they throw them in prison.
  - b. And then, down in [v. 26](#), when they come to drag them back in from the temple grounds there, we're told that they did so very cautiously, because "[they were afraid of being stoned by the people.](#)" So there's not just jealousy. There's also fear.
  - c. And then, finally, down in [v. 33](#), we see that there's not just jealousy and fear. There's also anger and fury: "[When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.](#)"
  - d. What's conspicuously missing in all of these descriptions? Joy.
    - i. That's the tragic irony. When we tether our joy to something other than Jesus, we sabotage it even as we desperately pursue it.
- E. And, you know, we'd be wise to monitor our own emotional lives for this sort of thing.
  1. Sometimes we don't always know when idolatry is happening, when our hearts are straying from God.
  2. But I'll tell you, one of the clearest indicators is that you're feeling like these Jewish leaders here. You're finding yourself unusually prickly, scared, self-protective, vindictive, angry, competitive, possessive, jealous, overly critical.
    - a. You start to tune into these emotions and look at what they're all orbiting around. And there's your god, there's your idol, there's the thing to which you've attached your faith, and hope, and joy.
      - i. And there's the reason you're spinning out . . . and miserable!
- F. So come to Jesus this morning! Come for the first time, come for the thousandth time. And let's find our joy in him together. It's a crazy joy that sustains even in spite of suffering.