A Different Way to Live

I. Introduction

A. Every culture has a value system. It tells us what matters most, what success looks like, and what kind of life we should pursue. Our culture prizes influence, freedom, and comfort. Influence is used to build a platform. Freedom is used to pursue ourselves. Suffering is something to avoid at all costs. But Acts 5 presents a radically different vision. The apostles have been so transformed by the risen and reigning Jesus that they now see these things through the lens of the Kingdom. They use their influence to serve others. They use their freedom to bring life to others. And they receive suffering as an honor rather than a defeat. The Gospel doesn't just change what we believe—it changes what we value.

II. A Different Way to Live

A. <u>The Kingdom uses influence to serve, not to elevate self.</u>

1. If there is one word that captures our cultural moment, it may be the word **influence**. We even have a new vocation built around it: the social media influencer. Entire careers are built on accumulating followers, building a platform, shaping opinions, and capturing people's attention. The dictionary defines *influence* as "the capacity or power to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior, or opinions of others." By that definition, every one of us possesses influence. We may not have thousands of followers online, but every one of us is shaping someone. The question is not whether we have influence; the question is how we perceive it, how we use it, and perhaps most importantly, who is influencing us.
2. Our culture tends to treat influence as something to be accumulated. It is often viewed as a means of increasing our significance, expanding our platform, or validating our worth. The more followers, the more influence. The more influence, the more value. Many influencers have become incredibly powerful—not because they hold an official title, but because they have earned the trust and attention of millions of people. Influence has become one of the most valuable currencies in our society.

3. The desire to influence others isn't wrong. In fact, it's deeply human. Parents influence their children. Teachers influence their students. Friends influence one another. Pastors influence congregations. Employers influence their employees. Every one of us leaves an imprint on the lives of those around us. The issue isn't whether we have influence, but whether our influence ultimately points people toward ourselves or toward Christ.
4. This is where Acts 5 presents such a striking picture of the Kingdom of God. Luke tells us that "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12). By this point in the story, the apostles have become well known throughout Jerusalem. Their ministry has attracted widespread attention. In part, this is because of the remarkable healings God is performing through them. It may also be because of the sobering account of Ananias and Sapphira in the previous chapter. Whatever the reason, people are talking. Their influence is growing. Luke describes an extraordinary scene. People are bringing the sick into the streets, laying them on cots and mats in the hope that even Peter's shadow might fall across them. Crowds gather from the surrounding towns, bringing those who are sick or oppressed by unclean spirits, and Luke simply says, "they were all healed" (Acts 5:16). But I want us to notice what the apostles do with this influence.
    a) They don't leverage it to build a movement centered around themselves. They don't create distance between themselves and ordinary people. They don't use their growing reputation to gain comfort, wealth, or prestige. Instead, they allow their influence to become a channel through which the compassion and healing ministry of Jesus continues to flow into the world. The more influence they receive, the more they give themselves away in service to others.
    b) That shouldn't surprise us because this is exactly what Jesus did. Matthew describes Jesus' ministry in almost identical language: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction

among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick... and he healed them" (Matthew 4:23–25).

c) Jesus' fame spread, but His fame was never His goal. His growing influence simply created more opportunities to reveal the Father's compassion. Wherever Jesus went, people encountered the mercy of God. Now, after His resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the apostles continue that same ministry. The ministry of the apostles is not something fundamentally different from the ministry of Jesus; it is the continuation of Jesus' ministry through His Spirit-empowered Church.

5. That means the same is true for us today. Any influence we possess is not ultimately ours. It is a gift entrusted to us by Christ. Whether our influence extends to a congregation, a classroom, a business, a neighborhood, a family dinner table, or just one close friendship, it has been given so that the life of Jesus might flow through us into the lives of others. Kingdom influence is never an end in itself; it is always a means of serving others.
6. This also explains why the religious leaders react so strongly. Luke tells us that "the high priest rose up, and all who were with him... filled with jealousy" (Acts 5:17). Their reaction isn't merely theological; it's deeply personal. One commentator observes, "Three circumstances evoke the reaction of the high priest and Sadducees: the apostles' expanding popularity through preaching, their signs, and the apostles' disobedience to the leadership's prohibition to preach."[1]

a) The apostles possessed something the religious leaders desperately wanted. Influence. The Sanhedrin had authority, but the apostles had influence, and those are not the same thing. Authority is granted through a position. Influence is earned through trust, integrity, faithfulness, and love. Authority can require compliance; influence inspires willing response. People with authority but little influence often generate

[1] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), 237.

frustration. People with genuine influence frequently need very little authority because others trust them enough to follow.

b) The irony of Acts 5 is that the religious leaders are trying to protect their authority while the apostles aren't trying to protect anything at all. They're simply serving people in the name of Jesus. The leaders see influence as something to possess. The apostles see influence as something to steward. And that is the great Kingdom reversal. Jesus possessed all authority in heaven and on earth, yet He knelt to wash His disciples' feet. He touched lepers. He welcomed children. He forgave sinners. He laid down His life for His enemies. The greatest influence the world has ever known looked like a servant. The apostles simply followed in His footsteps. The question for us, then, is not whether we are influential. Every one of us is influencing someone. The real question is whether the people around us become more impressed with us, or whether, through our words, our presence, our generosity, and our love, they catch a glimpse of Jesus.

7. Reflection Question: Where has God entrusted you with influence, and are you using that influence primarily to advance yourself or to bless others in the name of Christ?

B. <u>The Kingdom uses freedom to give life, not to pursue self.</u>

1. Freedom is one of the defining values of our culture. We prize it, defend it, and even build our identities around it. Yet if we're honest, our culture often defines freedom in deeply individualistic terms. Freedom means the ability to do what I want, when I want, however I want. It is autonomy. It is self-determination. It is the absence of anyone telling me how I ought to live. We instinctively think of freedom as something that belongs to us, something to protect, preserve, and pursue for our own sake.
2. The Kingdom of God offers a radically different understanding of freedom. Paul helps us see this in his first letter to the Corinthians. Quoting what appears to have been a popular slogan in Corinth, he writes, "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful,' but not all

things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). Paul doesn't deny that Christians are free. Instead, he asks a better question. Freedom is not ultimately about, "What am I allowed to do?" Freedom is about, "How can my life become a blessing to someone else?" Christian freedom is never an excuse for self-indulgence; it is an invitation to self-giving love.

3. That is precisely what we find in Acts 5. The apostles have been arrested, imprisoned, and ordered to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Their freedom has literally been taken from them. Locked behind prison doors, it appears that the religious leaders have finally succeeded in silencing them.
4. But during the night, the Lord intervenes. An angel opens the prison doors, leads the apostles out, and gives them an unexpected command: **"Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life"** (Acts 5:20). He doesn't say, "Now run." He doesn't say, "Find a safe place." He doesn't say, "You've escaped—don't let them catch you again." Instead, he tells them to go right back to the very place where they had been arrested and continue proclaiming Christ. God doesn't free them from prison so they can protect themselves. He frees them so they can continue giving life to others. That is Kingdom freedom. Freedom is not an end in itself. Freedom is always given for mission.
5. Notice the phrase the angel uses: **"Speak...all the words of this Life."** That is a remarkable description of the Gospel. The message the apostles proclaim is not merely a set of religious ideas or moral principles. It is the announcement of life itself. The life that Jesus promised. The life that conquered death. The very life of God now shared with His people through the Holy Spirit. Because this life comes from God Himself, it cannot perish. It is eternal life breaking into the present age.
6. The angel also tells them to proclaim **all** the words of this life. One commentator notes that this means holding nothing back—not because of

fear, not because of social pressure, not because of tact.[2] The apostles are not free to edit the Gospel to make it more palatable. They are free to proclaim it faithfully because they know that the Gospel itself is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

7. That is exactly what Peter does when he is brought before the Sanhedrin once again. Rather than defending himself, Peter proclaims Christ. His sermon is a beautiful summary of the Gospel. He tells the leaders, **"You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead."** Then Peter adds something the early church emphasized again and again, though we sometimes neglect it today: **God exalted Jesus to His right hand as Leader and Savior.** The early Christians didn't simply proclaim that Jesus had risen; they proclaimed that Jesus reigns. Peter calls Him both **Leader** and **Savior**. He is the Leader—the Prince, the Pioneer, the Author of Life who has opened the way into God's Kingdom. And He is the Savior—the One who rescues humanity from sin, death, and every form of evil, bringing us into the fullness of life with God. Because Jesus is both Leader and Savior, repentance and forgiveness are now offered in His name to all who believe.[3]
    a) Do you see why the apostles cannot remain silent? They are not merely defending an opinion. They are announcing Life itself. The freedom they have received from Christ compels them to offer that same life to everyone around them.
    b) One commentator makes an insightful observation: "The only reason the apostles finally appeared before the council was their own willingness to do so. And they were willing because the events of the night had

[2] Bock, 239.

[3] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 312.

convinced them once more that they were very much in God's hands."[4] That sentence captures the heart of Christian freedom.

c) The freest people in Acts 5 are not the men sitting on the council with political authority. The freest people are the apostles who know their lives belong entirely to Jesus Christ. Because they belong to Him, prison cannot ultimately imprison them, threats cannot ultimately intimidate them, and death itself cannot ultimately defeat them. That is true freedom. It is not the freedom to do whatever we want. It is the freedom to joyfully do whatever Christ asks of us because our lives are secure in Him. Perhaps the question we need to ask ourselves is not, **"Am I free?"** but, **"What am I doing with the freedom Christ has given me?"** Is my freedom primarily about protecting my comfort, guarding my time, and preserving my preferences? Or has my freedom become a means by which others encounter the life of Jesus?

8. Reflection Question: How are you using the freedom Christ has given you? Is it primarily directed toward your own comfort and preferences, or is it becoming a channel through which others encounter the life and hope of the Gospel?

C. <u>The Kingdom receives suffering as an honor, not as a defeat.</u>

1. If influence and freedom are two of the highest values in our culture, then comfort may be the highest of all. We instinctively organize our lives around avoiding pain and minimizing inconvenience. We spend enormous amounts of time, energy, and resources trying to create lives that are safe, secure, and comfortable. When hardship comes, our first instinct is often to ask, "*What went wrong?*" We assume suffering is something to escape, eliminate, or overcome as quickly as possible. If life becomes difficult, perhaps God has abandoned us. If obedience becomes costly, perhaps we've taken a wrong

[4] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, 43 vols., *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. David Dockery (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 167.

turn. If following Jesus leads to rejection or hardship, we can begin to wonder whether something has gone terribly wrong.

2. The apostles would challenge that assumption. Throughout Acts 5 they have done everything we would consider faithful. They have proclaimed the Gospel. They have healed the sick. They have served the broken. They have courageously obeyed God rather than men. If anyone should experience blessing and success, it should be them. Yet faithfulness doesn't lead to comfort; it leads to conflict. They are arrested, threatened, interrogated, and ultimately flogged. The Sanhedrin has them beaten and once again commands them not to speak in the name of Jesus before sending them away.
3. If Luke were writing according to our expectations, we might expect the next sentence to say the apostles left discouraged, fearful, or exhausted. Instead, he gives us one of the most remarkable statements in the entire book of Acts: **"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name"** (Acts 5:41).
4. That is not a normal human response. People rejoice when they receive a promotion. They rejoice when they are vindicated. They rejoice when they succeed. The apostles rejoice because they have suffered. Why? Because they have undergone a complete transformation in how they understand honor.
    a) Our culture teaches us that honor comes through recognition, achievement, influence, success, or power. The Kingdom of God teaches something entirely different. Honor is found in sharing the life of Christ. The apostles don't rejoice because suffering is enjoyable. They don't celebrate pain for its own sake. They rejoice because their suffering has become evidence that they belong to Jesus and are participating in His mission.
5. Notice Luke's language carefully. They rejoiced because they had been **counted worthy** to suffer **for the Name**. Throughout the book of Acts, "the Name" is shorthand for Jesus Himself—His authority, His presence, His

mission, and His identity. Their joy isn't rooted in the wounds they have received; it is rooted in the One for whom they have received them. The honor isn't found in the suffering itself. The honor is found in being identified with Christ.

a) This is exactly what Jesus had prepared His disciples for. On the night before His crucifixion He told them, **"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you"** (John 15:20). Jesus never promised His followers a life free from hardship. Instead, He promised them His presence within it. The path of discipleship would follow the same road He Himself had walked.

b) That theme runs throughout the New Testament. Paul writes in Philippians that his deepest longing is "to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death" (Philippians 3:10). Peter would later encourage suffering believers by saying, "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13). Both apostles understand that suffering is not merely something we endure *for* Christ; it is something through which we experience deeper communion *with* Christ. The risen Jesus does not simply send His people into suffering while remaining distant from them. He meets them there. The One who stood before Pilate... the One who was mocked... the One who was scourged... the One who carried His cross... now walks beside His disciples as they bear theirs. The apostles don't rejoice because suffering has become pleasant. They rejoice because suffering has become a place of fellowship with the living Christ.

(1) This is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith. The Kingdom does not glorify pain; it glorifies Jesus. Yet because Jesus is present even in suffering, suffering itself is transformed. It becomes one of the places where our faith is purified, our dependence is deepened, our witness is strengthened, and our fellowship with Christ becomes more profound than we imagined possible.

c) Perhaps the question is not whether suffering will come. Jesus has already answered that. The question is how we will interpret it when it does. Will we see hardship as evidence that God has abandoned us? Or will we receive it as another opportunity to share in the life of Christ, trusting that the Savior who calls us to take up our cross is the very One who carries us along the way?

6. Reflection Question: When following Jesus becomes costly—whether through rejection, sacrifice, disappointment, or hardship—do you instinctively see it as defeat, or as an invitation to know Christ more deeply and bear faithful witness to Him?

III. Closing Thoughts

A. Acts 5 leaves us with a simple but searching question: **What has so captured our hearts that it now shapes the way we live?** For the apostles, the answer was clear. They had encountered the risen and exalted Christ. Because of Him, influence became an opportunity to serve, freedom became an opportunity to give life, and suffering became an opportunity to bear faithful witness. Luke closes this chapter by saying, "*Every day...they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.*" (Acts 5:42). That is the invitation before us as well—not simply to admire the apostles, but to allow the risen Christ to so reshape our lives that everything we have and everything we endure points to Him.

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