

God's Power Through His Messengers

Acts 5:12-42

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Have you ever tried stopping something that proved overpowering? Have you ever tried to hold off a fire that threatened your home? Or have you been in a flash flood or terrible wind storm in the desert? There are often feelings of frustration, fear, and helplessness in situations like these. It is becoming increasingly clear to us as we study Acts that the power of God is in His messengers, and His message is not going to be stopped, not by man nor the devil himself. In our study this morning, we will see that the religious leaders have hardened their hearts in resistance, but God's messengers will not be intimidated or silenced.

The Message Is Validated (5:12-16)

It is essential for us to understand what is going on in this section. It isn't that the Apostles are on their first humanitarian aid tour. Of course, these miracles are incredible markers of the power of God, and they reveal the gentle caring heart of God and of the early church family, but more than that, they are *signs* that point to something other than the miracle itself. Namely, God is validating the Apostles' message by doing supernatural miracles through them. Very similar to how Jesus used the miracles to validate his message. "...even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (John 10:38)

It is also important to note *where* this is happening. Once again, the Apostles are using Solomon's porch as a teaching and healing ministry hub. This would have been right in the face of the religious leaders in the Temple, and Luke is intentionally recording the actions of the Apostles in Solomons Porch in juxtaposition to the Sadducees in the Temple. The Temple was supposed to be the location where the poor were provided for, the sick could find healing and help, the weary could find rest, and all who came there could find the truth of God that they so desperately needed to hear. But this was not happening in the Temple, it was happening on the front porch, and it wasn't trained and educated Sadducees administering God's varied graces, but rather an "unqualified" group of men declaring a radical message of new life and resurrection, and leading a movement defined by supernatural power, deep care for one another, and, most offensive of all, no fear of the religious elite.

The Messengers Are Freed (5:17-26)

The rapid growth of this movement, coupled with the lack of fear and submission to the religious elite, filled the high priest and Sadducees with jealousy, and as a result, they tossed the Apostles into prison again. However, God had other plans and sent an angel down to unlock the doors and set them free with directions to head right into the Temple and "speak to the people all the words of this Life." The Apostles obeyed, moving from the front porch to the living room with this message of life in God's Son Jesus, the Messiah. We see the jealousy of the religious leaders turn to fear once they

hear the Apostles have gotten out. Despite this movement's good and Godly qualities, they are worried about the massive crowd turning violent and stoning them.

The Messengers Won't Stop (5:27-32)

The dialogue in this section is filled with dramatic and almost hilarious irony! Once again, they demand the Apostles stop teaching, particularly the offensive teaching that Jesus' blood is on them! This, of course, was a slightly different tune than they screamed out at Jesus' trial when Pilate washed his hand of the blood of Jesus, and "all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (Matt 27:25). Then in vs. 29, the Apostles answer the hypothetical question they posed to the Sadducees in 4:19 about whether they should listen to them or to God. Once that blow had landed, they once again directly accused these religious leaders of being the ones who killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree. Yet the apostle's message doesn't end with this in-your-face truth, but with the grace and mercy of God revealed through His offer of forgiveness for those who repent! The grace of God extends to the very ones who demanded Jesus be crucified.

It is abundantly clear in this conflict that the Apostles have no intention of heeding the demands of these jealous and fearful men. They are messengers of God, and there is nothing that can be done to them to make them deny or keep quiet about what they have seen. They have seen the resurrected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, they have seen the Holy Spirit, they have seen the power of God manifest in and through them by the speaking of other languages and incredible miracles of healing, and they have seen how the truth of God can transform hearts in a moment! This is a movement of God, and there is nothing anyone can do to prevent its spread.

What If These Messengers Are From God? (5:33-42)

In the face of all this evidence, will these religious leaders continue to reject and oppose this message? Luke lets us know that there are those within the leadership who are having a softening of the heart. Here we are introduced to Gamaliel, who warns his fellow leaders that there is a chance that this message and movement might be legitimate, and if so, they could find themselves in opposition to God Himself. If it is not from God, it will simply "die" off like other movements. Gamaliel's words seem to soften their rage, and the leaders are persuaded not to kill the Apostles but rather only to beat them and command them to stop spreading the message. Not only did God use Gamaliel at that moment, but Gamaliel will profoundly affect the story of Acts as we continue. Though this Pharisee is only mentioned one other time, one of his disciples was a zealous up-and-coming Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus.

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