



Sent – Part 6

Genuine Christianity in a Broken World

Last week, we studied **Acts 4:32-5:11**. The early church is stronger than ever following Peter and John's release, but amid this seemingly perfect congregation, we encounter our first problem with someone *within* the Body. There are two paths for the Christian represented within this passage. The first is Ananias, who walked a path of hypocrisy, reluctance, and ultimately death. The second is Barnabas, who walked a path of authenticity, surrender, and ultimately life.

This week, we will take a look at **Acts 5:12-42**. Once again, the Apostles find themselves under arrest for preaching the Gospel before the Jewish people in the Temple, but this time an angel of the Lord intervenes to release them from prison. The chief priests confront the Apostles who have fearlessly returned to the Temple to continue their preaching and in this moment, we witness what genuine Christianity in a broken and hostile world looks like. If we are going to be Christians who make an impact for the Kingdom, we must learn to trust God supremely, witness at every opportunity, and obey no matter what.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
 - What is something the group can be praying about?
 - What is something the group can praise this week?

 - What do you think it means to trust God supremely?
 - Why is it difficult for people to obey God?
 - Do you think the church today has the boldness of the Apostles?
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BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

1. Trust God Wherever You Are

Acts 5:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

This is the second time in as many chapters that the Apostles have been arrested by the Jewish religious authorities. The Sadducees, to which verse 17 refers, were a priestly aristocracy that had attained power through its connection to high-priestly families.¹ As members of the Sanhedrin, the primary Jewish religious council, and the Jewish priesthood, the Sadducees were incredibly wealthy and held powerful social influence. This group, like the Pharisees, spent years trying to undermine Jesus during His earthly ministry, but to no avail. They now continue their work by targeting Jesus' apostles who carry on His message.

The text says the High Priest and the Sadducees were filled with jealousy, or some translations say indignation. They were not opposed to Christianity merely because they didn't believe in Jesus as the Messiah. Because of their position of power within Jewish society, they were jealous of the Apostles' gaining influence and the large following they had among the people, and they couldn't stand that they were no longer the central guiding religious figures of Israel. However, their attempt to silence the Apostles again, at least from the perspective of the text, is immediately squashed.

Acts 5:19-20 (ESV)

But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." ²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

An angel of the Lord intervenes and frees the Apostles from prison in such a way that no attention is drawn towards them. In verse 22 and 23, we are told the officers found the prison doors locked shut and the guards standing at post outside, further confirming the miraculous nature of the Apostles' escape. Some speculate the Apostles were

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*, 39.



transported supernaturally from the prison back to the Temple, but considering the angel opened the prison doors and asked them to go there, this is very unlikely.

Right after being released by the angel, the Apostles go back to doing the very thing that got them arrested in the first place. This is because genuine Christians are people who trust God even in difficult circumstances. After two arrests, you might think the Apostles would begin to have second thoughts about preaching the Gospel, considering it always seems to lead to prison. Those in opposition against them, such as the High Priest, the Sadducees, and the Jewish priesthood, all hold incredible power and influence and have demonstrated it time and again. Yet despite these tough circumstances, the Apostles continue to trust God.

When the angel commands them to return to the Temple to continue preaching, there is never a record of complaint or hesitation. They simply go and do what God has told them to do, and they do it immediately, without delay. The Apostles do what God says even when it puts them in danger, when it puts them back into the mouth of the lion. A heart that trusts God can be clearly seen by a world that looks on. Real Christians are marked by a trust in God that is evident in how they approach their circumstances. We should be like the Apostles who trust God supremely wherever we are.

2. Witness at Every Opportunity

Three times in this passage the proclamation of the Gospel becomes central to the narrative. The first instance we've already touched on. After being released from prison by the angel, the angel tells the Apostles to stand in the Temple and preach the words of this life. The disciples didn't wait to continue their preaching even after literally being arrested for their faith. They took the opportunity to witness to those in Jerusalem instead of taking a break, which no one reading would have blamed them for.

After discovering the Apostles had miraculously escaped jail, the religious authorities seek them out once again, finding them exactly where they were the last time.

Acts 5:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." ²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

The officers feared being stoned because they recognized the Apostles had generated a following and were quite popular among the people. If they weren't careful, the people might turn on them, and their recognition of this fact shows the religious authorities already feel their authority slipping. This is further confirmed by verse 28 where the High Priest condemns the Apostles for essentially blaming Jesus' death on them. They did not want to be held responsible and were more concerned about maintaining their



power than accepting the truth of who Jesus was. Peter gives his response beginning in verse 30:

Acts 5:30-32 (ESV)

³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

This is the second instance of the Apostles' Gospel witness. To the High Priest's dismay, Peter does identify him as responsible for Jesus' execution, and rightfully so. The priests demanded Jesus be crucified for speaking blasphemy; that is, claiming to be the incarnation of God. However, Jesus' fate was always in His own hands, even if human actors were involved. Because of His sacrifice, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of the Father, where He now sits in Heaven awaiting His return, and He has secured salvation through the eternal forgiveness of sins.

The Apostles boldly assert they are witnesses to this truth. The central purpose of genuine Christianity is knowing Jesus and making Jesus known to the world. Even when brought before the religious authorities to answer directly to them, the Apostles take the opportunity to spread the Gospel, even to those who are in opposition to it.

The third instance of the Apostles' witness is in verse 42, where the text says they did not cease preaching Jesus as the Christ, continuing daily in the Temple and in every house. The Apostles wanted the message of Jesus everywhere, and they wanted it preached at every opportunity, no matter who or where it was. The circumstances of their witness were irrelevant. They could be fresh out of jail, facing authorities who wanted to literally kill them, or just a typical day. Take inventory of what's keeping you from talking about Jesus and kill it.

3. Obey God No Matter What

Acts 5:29 (ESV)

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

Another mark of genuine Christianity is obedience to God. When faced before the religious authorities, Peter makes it clear that God is to be obeyed rather than men. This is why, despite being arrested and told explicitly not to preach the Gospel, the Apostles continue to do it anyway. They blatantly ignored worldly powers in order to be obedient to Christ, refusing comfort, security, prominence, or acceptance.



Verses like Acts 5:29 usually bring up the question of how Christians should relate to the government concerning the message of the Gospel. Peter says we are to obey God rather than men, but Paul appears to give contradictory advice in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 13:1-2 (ESV)

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

If Christians are to submit to the government because God has given them their authority, how can the Apostles resist Jerusalem's government represented in the priesthood? Should we obey no matter what, or is there a limit? The answer is that Christians, although commanded to submit to the government, are commanded to submit to an even higher authority: God Himself. God's commands supersede governments and their laws, so if spreading the Gospel requires resisting government, such resistance is moral and not a violation of Paul's teaching.

During the Apostles' hearing before the High Priest, a member of the council named Gamaliel stands up and surprisingly defends them. During Jesus' time, other Jews rose up and revolted against the Roman government, some even having messianic overtones like Jesus did. Each revolt was successfully quelled, but considering this Gamaliel makes an interesting point.

Acts 5:38-39 (ESV)

³⁸ 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; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

If the Apostles preach a false Gospel and seek to gain power for themselves, they'll be put down just like the revolutionaries before them. If they preach a true Gospel, the government finds itself in direct opposition to God, and will sit under God's judgment. The point is that even the government has its God defined limits. Our highest allegiance is to Christ, and to proclaim the Gospel to the world we will inevitably find our obedience to be costly.

Submission to the government is not an excuse to remain silent concerning the message of Jesus. As Christians living in the United States, our religion has not conflicted with our safety, comfort, or social status. This is a great thing, but the Apostles didn't have this luxury, nor do Christians in other parts of the world today. When the day arrives, we must be ready to chase obedience to God above all else. Echoing the words of Gamaliel, if we are of God, nothing can stand against us, not even the power of government.



4. Rejoice Whatever the Outcome

The religious authorities take Gamaliel's advice and release the Apostles once again, but not before beating them first. The reaction of the Apostles is astounding.

Acts 5:41 (ESV)

⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

The Apostles didn't shy away from persecution; they embraced it as a badge of honor. If they were being persecuted by man, that meant they were on the right track! Christians are supposed to live, like the Apostles did, in an upside-down world. We may be dishonored by man, but we are identified with Christ. We receive no glory in the world's eyes, but we receive crowns in Heaven.

The reason the Apostles can rejoice regardless of the outcome of their actions is because they realize even when things are bad here on earth, their ultimate goal is not of earth; their ultimate goal is Jesus. This is evidenced in Paul's words to the Philippians:

Philippians 1:21 (ESV)

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

This is what it looks like to have joy in all circumstances. If we still live, we live for Jesus and His Gospel. If we die, we receive our reward and get to live with Jesus for all eternity. As Christians, we need to live in a way that we can see through our circumstances towards God.



BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Does trust of God characterize your life?
 - Do you follow and trust God without hesitation?
 - Is the message of Jesus the primary message of your life?
- What keeps you from knowing Jesus and making Him known?
 - Do you not invest enough time to know Him and make Him known?
 - Do you not have the boldness you need to tell someone about Him?
 - Are you waiting for the right circumstances?
- Does obedience to God characterize your life?
 - Where is God calling you to obey?
 - Is there anything you have given greater authority than God that you obey instead of Him?
- Do you rejoice regardless of the circumstances?
 - Is your life marked by grumbling over difficult circumstances?
 - Do you consider yourself joyful to suffer for God or is suffering a step too far to be happy serving Him?