

17b ACTS

Let's resume our study now in Acts chapter 5. The very last portion of the chapter concerns itself with some of the reaction outside the church. We've seen this thing that took place internally which caused people to respect the apostles and the presence of God among the apostles greatly, so much so that they feared to stand with them when they went down to Solomon's porch. You can imagine if you told a little white lie and were struck dead, people said, well, maybe I'll let Peter stand over there and I will stand over here in case I should somehow commit a faux pas and wind up costing me my life.

I think there was also the realization that there was starting to be an increasing awareness and attention being paid to what was going on in Solomon's porch and that there was the possibility of the Sanhedrin getting involved, which of course they do. These signs and wonders are done among the people and so on. So the high priest grows up in verse 17, and all those who were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and they were filled with indignation.

This is another thing we mentioned last time and didn't really analyze. Who were the primary opponents of the Lord Jesus when He was conducting His ministry? It was primarily, if you go back and look at the notices in the Gospels, Luke chapter 5 is where it begins. It is the Pharisees.

The Pharisees are the primary opponents. The Pharisees are the ones who question Him. The Pharisees are the ones who antagonize Him and who get together and they will recruit some of the others.

But Pharisees are Jesus' primary opposition. Here it seems to be the Sadducees that are opposing the disciples. Why is that? Well, the short answer is, who is being threatened? When Jesus came, what was His message? It was not so much the message that the disciples, the apostles are preaching now.

Jesus' message, the message of John the Baptist was, repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. Change your mind, which means your mind needs changing. Which means there is something wrong with your religion.

There is something wrong with your walk. Your spiritual life is bad. Change your mind.

Well, the people in charge of religious life who are aggrandizing themselves and looked up to and strutting on the street corners and praying to be seen didn't want anyone disturbing the status quo. We like the status quo. We like the way things are.

And you find an analog today in the structured version of the Christian church. When you look around at our denominations and you drive up and down the streets of the Metroplex and you see these huge edifices with steeples and parking lots and education

buildings. I know there is always a tendency to think, well, we don't have those things so we are just going to throw rocks at everybody that does.

But there is nothing intrinsically wrong with those. But when that becomes a little empire, when that becomes the thing to defend or the thing to grow or the thing to expand, when your sermon is all about gathering money for the next big building, which is going on in Dallas even as we speak in places very close to where I work. And you've got million dollar budgets and you've got all about infrastructure and all about the status quo and who is on staff and who is looked up to and who is going to be mentioned from the pulpit and who is going to be thanked and who is going to be acknowledged, who is visible, who is published, who is on the radio, who gets the interview.

And the benefits that are perceived in being notable, this is what was going on in Pharisee land in Jesus' day. I am noticed. I am respected.

Remember what the Bible says about the best seats in the assembly? When someone walks in and you start treating them differently and giving them a good seat because you're hoping to curry favor and maybe they'll make a donation type of thing. This is what Jesus attacked. Jesus said, this fall you're all, you're washing the outside of the dish and inside you're corrupt.

You've whitewashed the tombstone and inside you're full of dead men's bones. And this visible religion is for the birds. It is your invisible religion that counts.

It's what goes on in your heart and in your soul. In the secret places of the heart when nobody can see, what are the thoughts and intents? That's what God is measuring. And Jesus brought that message and He says, you had better get this squared away because the kingdom is coming.

And if you don't square it away, you will miss the kingdom. Except a man be born again, he can't even see the kingdom of God. But unless a man is faithful and obedient, he will not enter the kingdom of God.

It is one thing to see it. It is another to enter it. I can see a lot of things that I will never enter into.

And it's the same with the kingdom. So the Pharisees had the most to lose should Jesus' message catch on. When Jesus said, the last shall be first and the first shall be last, who do you think felt threatened by that? Those who considered themselves to be first.

This is a different situation. A high priest rose up and all those who were with him, the sect of the Sadducees. Everybody should remember what their primary tenet of belief is, right? No resurrection.

We don't think there is any life after death. Right? So what is the primary tenet of the

message of the apostles that God has just struck Ananias and Sapphira dead to preserve? What is that message? We are eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So now who is being threatened? It's the Sadducees.

If this thing goes over with the people, our little Sadducee business is going to go bankrupt. Nobody is going to attend our Sadducee meetings. Nobody is going to join our group because we don't believe in a resurrection.

And this man, clearly and manifestly, has been raised and everybody says so. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15. Beginning in verse 12.

Now, Paul says, If Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? Where do you think the roots of this viewpoint are? Sadduceeism. If there is no resurrection of the dead, he says in verse 13, Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

You are wasting your time. Did you ever think of that? Some people say, but it's the beneficences. It's the love and the sharing and the caring and the good fellowship of Christianity.

That has value in and of itself. Whether or not Jesus was an actual literal person, or whether He really was the Son of God, or this whole resurrection business, that's really kind of secondary. The main thing is love.

All you need is love. Right? And that's what really counts. And we can all, you know, many roads to come to the same place of just peace and love and so on.

What does Paul say here? If Christ is not risen, our preaching is empty and your faith is empty. And empty is very mild in English. It doesn't convey the force that you find here in Greek.

He's basically saying, it's a waste. It is void. It is worthless.

Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ whom He did not raise up if in fact the dead do not rise. Now what happens to someone who is a false witness before God? The old Ananias and Sapphira story might come to mind in the circles who received this letter. Verse 16, If the dead do not rise, you Sadducees, then Christ is not risen.

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. Your Christian faith, I don't care how much love and brotherhood and sharing and caring and walking through the daisies hand in hand you have.

If you are still in your sins, your faith is worthless. That's what Paul says. Then also, those

who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

And this means perished utterly. It's like your pet dog. Once it dies, the ram is erased, the machine is disassembled, and that program is never going to run again.

It is over and done and gone. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, what does that mean? Love and caring and sharing and walking through the daisies hand in hand. If it's only doing you good in this life and then you die, we are of all men the most pitiable.

We are pathetic. Christianity is a pathetic form of faith if all it does is give you a warm fuzzy feeling right now. Paul says, this is the word of God.

I am not making this up and I am not spinning it. This is what he literally says. Christianity is all about the resurrection.

The dead are raised and Christ has been raised. Look at verse 20. But now, Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

He goes on to talk about the resurrection. As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. How many people are in Adam? Everybody.

All humanity is in Adam. How many people are in Christ? Not all humanity. Those who have accepted Him by faith.

We ask ourselves the question, Am I in Christ? If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. All things are become new.

And those who are in Christ shall be made alive. Will be resurrected. But each one in his own order.

Christ the first fruits. Afterward, those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father.

When He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. What was the issue with the Sadducees? What was the issue with the people that are all hung up on this life? Everything has got to be resolved in this life. I have got to get ahead and make it in this life.

If you are a Sadducee and there is nothing after you die, you had better start eating and you had better start drinking and you had better start being merry now. Because this is all there is. So it is all about power.

I want control. I want my destiny. I want my propers.

I want my just desserts. I want to get everything. I want to grab the brass ring.

People don't even know what that means anymore. Do you know where that saying

comes from? Grab the brass ring? Way back in the old days of carnivals when they had the carousel they had a little machine there. I didn't know this for a long time.

I thought why are people always talking about grabbing the brass ring? They act like that is such a big deal. But for a child on the little horse on the merry-go-round they would have this thing and you could lean out. See, it is a safety hazard now.

They don't do it. But you would lean out and if you could you could reach up and you could hook this little brass ring out of this machine and you could keep it. It was like your little prize for riding the merry-go-round.

And for a child that was a big deal. I snagged the brass ring. It is a brass ring.

It has no real intrinsic value but it is an achievement. Not everybody can do it. Not everyone could reach it.

I reached it. I snagged it. I have it.

I brought it home. And so it became a metaphor talking about achieving some form of success. But it is nice to know where that came from because that is just about all it is worth.

That is just about all it is if it is only in this life. But this is the Sadducean approach. Okay, now back to Acts 5. So, these followers of the high priest rose up and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

This is a serious threat to their little self-created economy. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. All the words of what life? Who is the opponent here? There is no life after death.

There is no resurrection. Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead. There is not new life in Christ.

There is no resurrection life. The angel says, Y'all come back out of there. Go back down.

Right back down where you got arrested yesterday and preach the words of this life. Now, it glosses right over this. They heard that.

They entered the temple early in the morning and taught. You look at the gap there between verse 20 and verse 21. It's 2 AM.

You've been chained up in a dark prison faced with the possibility of scourging, death. When Jesus Christ got arrested, He never came out of the prison. When John the Baptist got arrested, He never came out of the prison.

These men have been arrested and been put in the prison. And the angel comes and lets them out and says, Now, go right back down there and preach all the words of this life. Don't soften it.

Don't mute it down. Don't sugar coat it. Don't make it palatable.

Don't be conciliatory. Don't be ecumenical. Go down and preach all the words of this life.

Every time you preach a word of this life, you're ticking off another Sadducee. Go right back down and do the same thing. Well, between verse 20 and verse 21, you've got some hours.

You've got time for this idea. It's hard for us to imagine being seized. You get an inkling of it when you watch some of the movies that have been made about the diary of Anne Frank.

We saw one recently that was the pianist. We're talking about World War II where they would take the Jews and seize them and do all kinds of horrible things. But when you consider being seized against your will and being imprisoned with an unknown fate awaiting you because there's a large and powerful group of people who have the ability to take away your life, by some miracle, you escape, you are released, and you once again have your freedom.

And then they say, now go right back down there where you got arrested and do the same thing again. This requires some faith. This is not just an automatic, oh, okay, are you going to be there, angel? Are you going to come back tomorrow night and let me out before they cut my head off or before they crucify me upside down or something? This is a walk of integrity.

This is a life of faith and a life of obedience. When the Word of God is clear, we do what the Word of God says and we disregard the consequences, however grievous they may be. This is potentially, this is life-threatening.

I saw a guy walking on the top of a, what do you call that great big round thing at the fair? Ferris wheel. 100 feet up in the air. He's a man from Mexico.

He's a grandpa. He used to do this when he was young. He hadn't done it in decades.

But he got the idea that before he checked out, he wanted to do it again. So he trained for like a week. And then he went down to the fairgrounds here in Texas, I think in Houston.

They shut the fairgrounds down. He brought his grandkids. He had the whole family standing there watching.

And he got on top of the little swinging cabana thing that hangs in the middle of the

Ferris wheel, stood on the roof of it, and his son cranked the thing around until he was up at the top. And then he stepped off the roof onto the little skinny rail. It's about the size of a balance beam.

He's 100 feet up in the air, light rain falling, little breeze. And then his son puts the thing in first, lets out the clutch, and it starts going around. And grandpa's up there walking.

And as his son, you know, once the inertia is overcome, it starts going faster and faster. And pretty soon the grandpa is running at a pretty good clip on this slick, wet thing. And although they had checked the equipment out in advance, the thing seized up and stopped.

And he's got a little radio headset, and his wife is down there because he can't really, he doesn't have any bearings. He doesn't know if he's right at the top of the wheel or he's a little too far forward or a little too far backward. So his wife is watching from the ground talking to Gomez or whatever his name is up there saying, you know, a little further forward or, you know, I heard her saying, Andale, Andale, like, you know, hurry up, you're following behind.

And so he does this. Well, this is a totally needless risk. I asked myself, why would anyone do that? Do you want to just splatter it? And he was okay.

He actually pulled the thing off. He wanted to do one complete revolution, and he did. Well, people take their life in their hand that way voluntarily, and you can only say, you know, they're a few flowers short of a bouquet.

But these men are family men. They are normal human citizens. They have no desire to die.

They don't have a death wish. They're not hooked on danger, and yet their lives are threatened. The angel comes and says, Go stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

You notice the matter-of-fact way that the Bible tells these stories. If human beings had made this up, suddenly behold, there was a flash of light. And it was as though a portal opened in the ceiling, and in came a glowing angel with seven wings and ten horns.

And lo, he spoke, and it was like the boys... You know, it would have all of these embellishments. This is like the mailman arrived when they're sitting in the prison. It's one of the ways we know that inspired Scripture is not a human production because a human could not help but tamper with this if he was writing it.

So, at night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out. It told so matter-of-factly, and yet you think about this. An angel of the Lord came from the realms of heaven, opened the prison doors, and let them out.

Do you think any of these men ever forgot this experience? Hello there. I'm an angel of the Lord. Wait a minute.

I've got about 25 questions for you before you leave. Go stand in the temple. And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught.

The high priest and those with him came and called the council together with all the elders of the children of Israel and sent to the prison they had them brought. They did not... The intelligence network wasn't working too well that morning because they sent to the empty prison cell and say, Have those men... You can see the air being let out of their pomposity a little bit because they just assume that they're still there. When the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported saying, Indeed, we found the prison shut securely with the guards standing outside before the doors but when we opened them, we found no one inside.

Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard... You remember the captain of the temple is the chief security guy. ...heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. Well, now there's another understatement.

What are we messing with here? These men keep talking about the power of God. They're performing these supernatural acts of healing and now the prison will not hold them. What is the outcome going to be? Well, what sane, reasoning person who believes in God would not stop and say, Maybe I should consider that they've got a piece of information I should listen to.

Maybe they are, in fact, giving the message of God. And you know, the fact that they don't is a scary thing because we can get set in our ways. We can assume that we know the answer.

That we have believed this for a certain length of time and we are no longer susceptible to learning. One of the marks of a healthy, growing, spiritual life is that you continue to learn. If we go for weeks and months and we don't learn something, we should be alarmed.

Have we run out of things to learn? Have we suddenly found ourselves in full possession of all of the counsel of God? We understand the infinite God with all of the causes, conditions, successions, and relations that make up His plan and purpose. We know the past. We know the present.

We know the future. We know what we are going to be doing in the kingdom. We've got it all figured out.

And so we don't need to learn anything else. We've got sin totally under control. We no longer commit mental attitude sins.

We no longer commit sins of the tongue. We no longer commit overt sins. We are just fully possessed of every good work.

We run around glowing in the dark doing benefic... We don't, do we? So if we stop learning, if we don't see ourselves making progress, if we don't find ourselves identifying areas of failure and working on those, there's something the matter. These men are unteachable. That is their problem.

I don't believe there's a resurrection. Well, excuse me, the Lord of Glory just got raised from the dead and here are a dozen eyewitnesses and God the Holy Spirit is backing up their testimony with signs and wonders such as have never been seen in Israel except in these days. I can't absorb that.

I just can't. No. I'm sticking with my original understanding and my original premise.

There is no such thing as resurrection. I can't explain this. I don't know how to get out of the prison.

I don't know what the outcome is going to be. But one thing I know for sure, I started life. My daddy was a Sadducee.

I'm a Sadducee. My children are going to be Sadducees. I'm going to have Sadducee carved on my tombstone.

And that's going to be their legacy. Sadducee on the tombstone because unteachable. We should be learning.

We should be growing in grace and growing in knowledge of the Savior. And if we find ourselves stagnant, then we need to change something. Change churches.

Change Bible teachers. Change radio stations. Change something.

But if you're hungry and if you're thirsty for the Word of God, you will seek it out. You will find it. We will learn.

We will grow. These men have stultified. They have stagnated.

They have ossified. They have petrified. They are not learning anymore.

So, one came and told them saying, look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people. Well, we better go listen to what they had to say. It's not the response.

The captain went with the officers and brought them without violence because they feared the people lest they should be stoned. The people know they were locked up the previous night. Did they let you go? God let us go.

Wow! So now, if they try to arrest them again, the people are smarter than the leadership. When they brought them, they set them before the council. This is the Sanhedrin once again.

High priest asked them saying, did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood on us. Notice they cannot bring themselves to say the name of the Lord Jesus whom they were largely responsible for bringing to the cross. We told you not to teach in this name.

What name? The name of Jesus. What's going to happen at the end of time? At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. These tongues refuse to confess.

They will not so much as say His name. This is still a custom in the Middle East. I told you all before about Walid Jumblat who was a Muslim militia leader in Lebanon back in the early 1980s.

And the Christian, the Maronite faction there hated Walid Jumblat with a passion. They ascribed the assassination of President Jemael to Jumblat and his henchmen. And so anytime the subject of Walid Jumblat came up in conversation, if they were somehow forced to say his name, they would say, Walid Jumblat.

They had to spit his name out of their mouth. And it was as though their mouth had been corrupted by even speaking the name. Jumblat.

And it's a comical thing when you first hear it because their hatred is vociferous and intense. And it's not a joke to them. They actually feel that vocalizing those syllables has contaminated their mouth.

That's how these men are here. We told you not to teach in this name. You have filled all Jerusalem with your doctrine and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

Unteachable. Inflexible. Not willing to even consider.

Well, even Herod gave John the Baptist a hearing. These men will not even give him a hearing. Peter and the other apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men.

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you murdered, subtle as a brick, by hanging on a tree. Him, God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Now, these men know exactly.

These are theologically charged statements. Repentance. Forgiveness of sins.

Only God can forgive sin. Remember them saying that when Jesus... They are stating the

deity of Christ here. We are His witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.

Who has the Holy Spirit and who does not in this room where this meeting is taking place? I'm not talking about this room. I'm talking about their room. God has given the Holy Spirit to the obedient.

So this is a condemnation saying we've got the Holy Spirit and you don't. Who is obedient to God? You are disobedient or you would have the Spirit. You could not be any more abrasive than this.

You have to credit the disciples. This is Peter. This is Peter of the denial in the temple courtyard talking to the very same individuals he was so afraid of.

Peter and John were well known to these men. When they heard this, naturally, they were furious and plotted to kill them. But look who comes to the defense of all people in verse 34.

A Pharisee named Gamaliel. This is the Gamaliel who is the mentor of Saul of Tarsus. He is studying at the feet of this Gamaliel.

And Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. We're going to have to talk about some stuff we don't want you guys to hear. You go outside.

He said to them, Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago, Thutis rose up claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about 400, joined him.

He was slain. All who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee, rose up in the days of the census.

This is the census of Quirinius. This is the one in Luke chapter 2. All the world came to be taxed and so on. Drew away many people after him.

He also perished and all who obeyed him were dispersed. Now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone. If this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing.

Clearly, he is saying that Thutis and Judas were of men. Obviously, their stuff came to nothing. But, if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it.

Lest you even be found to fight against God, which is exactly what they're doing. And they agreed with him, which is surprising. How often do you get the Pharisees and the Sadducees to agree? But, this citing of historical precedent, they say, well, you're right.

These other things did die and collapse of their own weight. Even today, they say, if you kill Saddam Hussein, you're going to make him a martyr. And there's just going to be all of these guys rising up to try to avenge him.

If you kill bin Laden, there's going to be all of these guys rising up to avenge him. I'm not saying that's a convincing argument, but there is substance and there is merit in that argument. You can do yourself harm by making someone a martyr.

Far better to pull someone's fangs and leave them neutralized and helpless than to glorify them and make them a martyr. So, they agreed. They called the apostles.

They beat them, commanded them they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. So, they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

You look at this attitude, and this is what we're going to close with tonight. Their problems all stemmed from living a life of obedience and faith. If they had just quietly gone about their business and said, you know, I believe in God.

I know He's coming back and I'm going to go to heaven when I die. That's all I need. But by being faithful to their calling, by obeying the Word of God and doing what they were called to do, it has brought them into conflict with all kinds of authorities.

And because of it, they have been jailed. They have been wrongly accused. They have been beaten.

And this is the 40 minus 1. This is the 39 stripes. And this is no small thing. People died from this.

And they were severely, physically injured in this episode. But they counted it joy. They knew that this was suffering for the cause of Christ.

God brings us through things. We go through the valleys in our life. And things are not easy.

And it hurts. And it hurts a lot. But if we recognize that this is a part of God's plan for us, we don't understand the reason.

Ananias and Sapphira had no clue what God was up to. And they thought, well, my disobedience won't be any big thing. But it was.

Our obedience in times of stress, in times of pressure, in times of suffering is a big thing to God. And we look at it and say, yes, this is painful. And yes, this is scary.

And yes, this is threatening. But my life is in God's hands. And if this is a part of His plan,

then I count it as suffering for the sake of the name.

Am I ashamed of the name of Christ? Am I unwilling to undergo any kind of training, any kind of growth? Do I want to stagnate, sacrifice my inheritance, lose any potential for the future in serving God because I just have a low pain threshold? I just don't like stress? No testing befalls us but such is His common demand. And with every test, it is the way of escape. We are able to bear it or we are able to be delivered out of it, one or the other.

But it's all in God's hands. God knows when we need to deliver out. He knows when we need to be delivered through.

Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. It is the worthy who suffer. If we don't suffer, if we are not tested, it is probably because God knows it's a pointless waste of time.

We've got no starch. We've got no faith. There's no point in even bringing us into a test because we would just embarrass ourselves and others.

If we find ourselves in testing, it is because God considers us worthy to reflect His glory in that situation. It's an opportunity. It doesn't seem that great at the time, but afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Afterward, it makes us stronger. It qualifies us for blessing and for service in the future. There's a great song that says, It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrows will erase. When we have run the race, when we see Christ, it will be worth it all. And it genuinely will.

We will not regret a minute of it when we see Christ. That's the attitude that's reflected here. And it's a wonderful illustration for us.

It's a wonderful encouragement for us to endure. You have need of endurance so that after you have suffered a while, you receive the promise. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the great examples that You have placed in Your Word for us to absorb and digest and understand. We thank You for the opportunity that You have given us to live in this life, in this age, with the wonderful potentials, with all of the resources that are ours because of Christ. We pray that we will be found faithful.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts in such a way that we will learn and grow and be good and faithful servants, good stewards of the things that have been entrusted to us. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.