

## GO, TELL THEM ALL ABOUT THIS NEW LIFE

Acts 5:17-42

Key Verse: 5:20

*“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”*

In today's passage, the religious leaders lock up the apostles in prison in attempt to silence them. But God sets them free, enabling them to go and preach the gospel of Jesus. The Jewish leaders did not leave them alone, arresting them again and putting them on trial. Still, the apostles never gave in to their threats. Their faith and courage are an inspiration to all of us.

### I. GO, STAND IN THE TEMPLE COURTS (17-21a)

The church in Jerusalem had the first internal problem when Ananias and Sapphira lied about their offering for human recognition. God purified the young church by dealing with them severely. Both of them were killed on the spot. Fear of the Lord descended on the community. No one dared join them except the truly committed. All the believers continued to meet together in the temple courts. God blessed the apostles to perform many miracles among the people. The ministry began to have impact even on the people outside the city of Jerusalem (16). This caused more persecutions, however. Look at verses 17-18. *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.* Once again, persecutions came from none other than the religious leaders. When they saw the word of God spreading to the surrounding towns, they were alarmed. They were filled with jealousy. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. The religious leaders were filled with jealousy. We sometimes feel jealous toward other ministries that are successful. But this is wrong. We should praise God instead, repenting the sin of jealousy. The Jewish leaders arrested them and put them in the public jail. They thought they could stop them from preaching the gospel by putting them in prison. They were mistaken.

Look at verse 19. *“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.”* God was with his servants. He did not leave them alone in the prison. During the night, he sent an angel of the Lord to open the doors and bring them out. He set them free. We don't know how, but it happened so quietly that the guards who were standing outside the doors did not even notice they were gone. The Jewish leaders put them in jail to silence them. But no one can thwart God's plan to fulfill his purpose. So what was God's purpose for the apostles that he took them out of the jail?

Let us read verse 20 together. *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”* The angel did not say to them, “You are free now. Go, and hide in a safe place.” No. The Lord told them to go and stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life. “This new life” refers to the life in Jesus Christ.

The Bible declared that if anyone is in Christ, he is the new creation. The old has gone, the new is here! (2Co 5:17) God told them to preach the gospel of Jesus so that they could receive the gift of eternal life. This is the message Peter preached three times thus far in the book of Acts (2:22-39; 3:13-26; 4:8-12). God does not want even single person to die in sin and spend eternity in hell. This is the heart of God. That is why God sent his one and only Son Jesus into this world. Jesus fulfilled his mission by dying on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and by rising from the dead on the third day. Now, God was sending his apostles back to the temple courts at the risk of their lives. We must know the heart of God.

“Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people all about this new life.” This command teaches us about God’s mission given to his church. The church in Jerusalem had a beautiful community. They loved the Lord and they loved one another. They shared everything. They studied the Bible diligently and prayed together. It was a peaceful and loving community. This is the image of an ideal church. All churches would want to be like this beautiful church. But we must know that God’s mission for his church is more than a peaceful and loving community. He commanded the apostles to go and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. He knew this would create more conflicts with the Jewish leaders. The church would be persecuted for preaching in the name of Jesus. Yet, that is what God told them to do. His command made it clear what the mission of the church should be.

The Lord told them to go and stand in the temple courts. The temple was the house of God. It was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations (Mk 11:17). But the religious leaders had turned it into a market place. The sound of buying and selling drowned out the sound of prayers and Bible reading. Jesus was angry when he saw this. He drove out the merchants and overturned the money tables. Then Jesus used the temple courts for early-morning Bible study. Now his church was using the temple courts for Bible study, worship, and prayer. Still, the temple was under the control of the religious leaders. They had a security force at their disposal. Feeling jealous of the apostles, they tried to stop them from preaching there. In truth, Satan wanted to cut off the life-giving word of God from his people. The temple became a spiritual battlefield. The angel of the Lord said to the apostles, “Go, stand in the temple courts....” God wanted them to challenge Satan’s ploy. He told them to continue to share the life-giving word of God with the people in the temple courts.

“Go, stand in the temple courts....” How can we apply this to us as we serve young college students today? I believe it means for us to go and stand in our campus. Today’s colleges and universities are spiritual battlegrounds. All kinds of human ideas take young people’s attention away from God. Many of the venerable institutions such as Harvard and Princeton were founded for the purpose of raising Christian leaders. Until the turn of the last century, even public universities included Bible passages as part of their required readings. But such times are long gone. In this environment, it is not easy for us to stand in campus and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, we cannot ignore what God tells us. Go, stand, and tell the people about Jesus. This is a command from God.

How did the apostles respond to the Lord's command? Look at verse 21a. "*At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.*" They did not delay. They did not sleep in. As soon as the temple door opened at daybreak, the apostles went in and began to teach the word of God to the people. They did, as they had been told. They obeyed the word of God.

## II. WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN (21b-42)

Several hours later, the high priest and his associates arrived at the temple. They called together the Sanhedrin---the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent their police officers to the jail to bring out the apostles for another trial. They came back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." On hearing the report, the Jewish leaders were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to (24). Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." We can imagine how upset they were, because it was the very thing they wanted to prevent. The temple guards went into the temple courts to bring the apostles. They did not dare use force, fearing that the people would stone them.

Again, the apostles had to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (28). His statement tells us that the apostles' preaching was making great impact on the people in Jerusalem. It also tells us that their message was getting to the religious leaders. Still, he accused the apostle for violating the Sanhedrin's orders. How did the apostles respond?

Look at verse 29. *Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!"* The Sanhedrin had issued strict orders not to preach in Jesus' name. The apostles knew the consequence of disobeying the orders. But at daybreak, they went to the temple and began to preach. When the high priest asked them why, they gave a simple answer: "*We must obey God rather than human beings!*" They were standing before the supreme authority of the country who could sentence them to death, but they had no fear. How could they be so courageous? Their testimony before the Sanhedrin explains their courage.

Look at verses 30-31. "*The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.*" The apostles were standing before the full Sanhedrin. It was akin to some farm boys from Pennsylvania standing trial before the Supreme Court of the United States. But they were not intimidated. They preached the simple message of Jesus' cross and resurrection. Once again, they reminded the Jewish leaders how they had killed Jesus by hanging him on a cross. But God raised him from the dead. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior. Then they told them that the gospel of Jesus Christ was

the good news to all Israel, including the Jewish leaders. They told them how God wanted to bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. They had done a most terrible thing to Jesus, but it was not too late. God would forgive them if they repented. The apostles were standing on trial, but they delivered a powerful message of salvation to the judges!

A crazy driver is ramming his car through a crowd, killing and injuring many people. If you, a Christian, were there, would you try to take care of the injured people, or would you try to stop the crazy driver from killing more people? This is a question that a German pastor and theologian asked. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-45) was executed by the Nazis just before the end of WWII for trying to stop Hitler from killing more people, while many other Christian leaders only watched on the sidelines. We are told that just before his death, he had a vision in heaven. Hitler was standing before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus, who asked him, "Why did you do all these evil things? You deserve to suffer in hell." But Hitler protested, "I didn't know I would have to stand trial before God after my death. No one told me!" After the vision, Bonhoeffer beat his chest, crying out, "Lord, I am sorry I didn't have compassion for this man's soul. I never thought about sharing the gospel of salvation with him. I only thought about assassinating him. Please forgive me!"

The apostles shared the good news of Jesus with their persecutors. Again, how could the apostles be so courageous? Look at verse 32. *"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."* They were filled with the Holy Spirit as they obeyed the Lord. The worst thing the authorities could do to them was kill them. But they were not afraid of death. God who exalted Jesus was their God. The same God would raise them from the dead if they were killed. They would feel honored if they were killed because of their witnessing about Jesus Christ. While on earth, Jesus had told them, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Mt 10:28). They knew that their souls would live in eternity.

How can we be courageous witnesses to Jesus? What will we say if we are arrested for preaching the gospel in our campus and stand trial before authorities? How can we be like the apostles? Let us look at their testimony again. **First**, they had faith in God who made Jesus Prince and Savior. We know Jesus is our Savior. We should also know that he is our Prince. God exalted him to be King of kings and Lord of lords. And this Jesus will return one day to take us to the kingdom of God and reign with him in eternity. When we truly believe this, we don't have to fear anything. We can be his witnesses, no matter where and no matter when. **Second**, the apostles were fearless because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us power, love and self-discipline. The Spirit helps us to overcome our timidity (2Ti 1:7). So how can we have the Holy Spirit? Verse 32 says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him. To be filled with the Holy Spirit, we must repent our proud, stubborn, and disobedient attitudes. May God help us to obey the word of God from our hearts so that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit!

When the religious leaders heard the powerful testimony of the apostles, they were furious. They wanted to kill the apostles right there right then. Then one of the Pharisees stood up to address them. He was a prominent scholar. He had also been Paul's dissertation advisor for his theology degree (Ac 22:3). He argued that they didn't have to kill the apostles, because if the Christian movement were of human origin, it would die down on its own. Then he said, "But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (39). What he said was true. They could not stop the work of God by putting his servants in prison or killing them.

Persuaded by Gamaliel's counsel, the Jewish leaders decided to release the apostles, but only reluctantly. They had them flogged first. The security guards beat them with whips and canes. They inflicted physical pain on the apostles. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. What was the apostles' response to their verbal and physical abuse? Look at verse 41. *"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."* Wow. They rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Jesus. No one likes suffering. The disciples of Jesus did not like suffering. They hated it when Jesus talked about his upcoming suffering and death. But now they were different. They had hope in the kingdom of God. They were filled with the Holy Spirit.

We don't like to suffer. But we do. We suffer because of difficult people at work. We suffer because of difficult professors in school. We suffer because of bad health. Most of all, we suffer because of our sins. But suffering for Jesus is different. It has a meaning. Paul says in Romans 8:17, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Peter also said, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1Pe 4:12-14).

Look at verse 42. *"Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah."* The apostles continued to participate in the sufferings of Christ by teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. They did so day after day, in the temple courts, and from house to house. May God help us to participate in the sufferings of Christ by sharing the gospel of Jesus everyday!

We learned today that the apostles preached the gospel of Jesus, saying, "We must obey God rather than men." God also called us to go, stand in the campus, and preach the gospel. It is a tremendous privilege to share the gospel with future leaders. But it is not easy to be Jesus' witnesses in the spiritual battleground. May God fill us with the Holy Spirit everyday to be courageous witnesses!