

The Honour to be Dishonoured

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[0 : 00] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. This passage this morning is going to be something that's very similar.

We recognize that Jesus, at his resurrection, he ascended to heaven, and he gives us a command to go out into the battlefield, so to speak, to proclaim the good news. He empowers us and equips us with the Holy Spirit to do this.

And we see very quickly that opposition begins to rise. Persecution is faced by the apostles. And so certainly there might have been some in this early church that feared for their lives, feared that they were ill-equipped, but yet go forward with the power of the Holy Spirit to continue to proclaim the gospel.

[3 : 04] And what we see in this passage is that as a result, these young Christians receive honor as well to be ambassadors of Christ, that despite the schemes of the enemy, they will not overcome the plans of the king.

And so let's turn then to our passage. Acts chapter 5, starting in verse 17. 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 public jail. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. Go and stand in the temple courts, he said, and tell the people all about this new life.

At daybreak, they entered the temple courts as they had been told and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin, the full assembly of the elders of Israel, and sent to the jail for the apostles.

But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. And so they went back and reported, We have found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors. But when we opened them, we found no one inside.

[4 : 13] On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might mean. And then someone came and said, Look, the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.

At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force because they feared that the people would stone them. The apostles were brought in and made 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 teachings and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood. Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than human beings.

The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging 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.

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

[5 : 23] But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a while.

And then he addressed the Sanhedrin. Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago, Thutis appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about 400 men rallied to him.

And he was killed, and his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed,

and all his followers were scattered.

Therefore, in the present case, I advise you, leave these men alone. Let them go. For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.

You will only find yourselves fighting against God. His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. And then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

[6 : 29] The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. And 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.

This is the word of God. Will you pray with me again? Amen. Oh God, in you is hidden all treasure of wisdom and knowledge.

And so Lord, we ask that you open our eyes that we may see the wonders of your word this morning. That you may give us your grace that we may clearly understand and choose to follow after your wisdom. We pray this in the name of Jesus.

Amen. Well, as we begin to dig into this text, I think it may be good to kind of establish a timeline of where we have come so far in this book of Acts.

Because we recognize that all that's happened here has really only happened in just a matter of a few days or weeks. So we have Jesus who is crucified, dead and buried for three days. He rises from the dead.

[7 : 31] At the beginning of Acts, it says that he stayed with his people for 40 days before his ascension. Ten days after the ascension comes the day of Pentecost where the apostles received the gift of the Spirit.

And after this, we don't have an exact timeline, but we know that the apostles, they remained in Jerusalem to preach. And it was just then a matter of days, maybe just weeks, that it says there's over 5,000 male Christians.

So we think about that as families, women, and children. We may be talking somewhere in the range of 10,000 new Christians in the matter of a couple weeks since the resurrection of Jesus. And so you can imagine the sense of jealousy that these Jewish leaders must experience. How do we control these numbers? How do we push down this movement? And the answer they come up with is persecution.

This is what we saw a few weeks ago in chapter 4. Peter and John are arrested and they threaten them not to go on preaching God's Word. In our passage today, this pattern repeats. Yet, except the intensity begins to grow.

[8 : 29] Because not only are Peter and John arrested, but it says in our text that many apostles are arrested. At this time, they're not only threatened with physical harm, they are actually beaten and flogged in front of the Jewish council.

And so I want us to consider today this ministry of the apostles. Thinking, focusing really on three things. I want us to focus on the calling, the message, and the result.

So let's think first about the calling of these apostles. You know, we see in the beginning of this passage that the apostles are rounded up, they're arrested, they're put in jail for preaching the gospel.

They had been the ones that had been previously performing miracles and now a miracle is performed to them. They are the benefactors where this angel appears to them in the middle of the night, opens the prison doors, leads them out, instructs them to go back and to continue preaching in the temple.

And probably, if you're like me, we've read this passage a number of times. One thing that kind of stuck out to me in my study, though, is these distinct roles between the angel and the apostles. The angel instructs the apostles to preach, but the angel does not do any preaching.

[9 : 37] And I wonder if the apostles, when this angel comes upon them, certainly a novel happening, if they thought, why don't you stay with us? Why don't you come to the temple to preach this good news?

Because while their numbers had grown, they'd had no success in being able to preach to these Jewish leaders. And so, let's bring an angel with us. Certainly, this makes sense, right? An angel is a better preacher than us.

Think about all the times where an angel appears in the Bible. People are frightened. They're terrified. They listen, and they respond. And so, let's not just have this angel involved in this jailbreak.

Let's bring him into the temple to preach, too. Then everyone will recognize that Jesus truly is this resurrected Messiah. But we recognize this doesn't happen here, right? Because this isn't the angel's role.

And we see something very important here. Is that the agents God uses for spreading the gospel are not angels, but men. You and I alone receive this calling to share this gospel message.

[10 : 40] This is what we heard from all the way back in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah, who says that God's speaking to his people. You are my witnesses that I am God.

This is what Peter says in our own passage in verse 32. He says, we are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given us that we may obey him. And so what Peter, he says in front of this Jewish council is almost identical to what Jesus declares himself after his resurrection.

He said, it is written that the Son of Man, the Messiah, will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sin will be preached in his name to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

He says, you are witnesses of these things. And Luke records again at the very beginning of the book of Acts these similar words of Jesus before his ascension. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

It is man alone who is anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit for the ministry of Christ. And so do we really recognize this to be an honor?

[11 : 55] to recognize that each one of us as believers anointed by the Holy Spirit we are better at proclaiming the gospel than angels. You may say, well, you've never seen me try to proclaim the gospel.

I'm not very good. I don't know what to say. I fumble through my words. I'm shy. I'm scared. But God says to us in this passage we see that Jesus is saying this is okay.

I recognize that you are imperfect. I recognize that you are flawed instruments. But we recognize that the weaker the instrument the greater the honor of the user.

And so think about it this way. If you had this contest to chop down these two trees that stood next to each other and you had one man who had this brand new well polished axe that's you know a very sharp blade and he had this other guy with this old rusted dull axe.

Who would you choose you think would likely win? Well the man with the sharp axe right? But who would usually likely get the most honor if he were to win? Well it's the man with the dull axe right?

[13 : 03] Because he's he's doing something that creates much greater effort. It requires much greater effort in order to win this contest against the sharp blade. In a similar way I had a friend in the states a number of years ago who bought a house and he had this garden and he'd to buy some gardening equipment for it and one of the things he needed to buy was a lawn mower but rather than buy a petrol or an electric one he decided he was going to buy one of those old fashioned push mowers because in his mind he thought well this will I'll have a greater sense of accomplishment if I use this old mower than just using a petrol one and so I'll have greatest satisfaction in keeping my lawn clean my grass short.

The reality is this only worked for a number of weeks before we realized this was a horrible idea.

This requires way too much effort on my part and he went and bought himself a petrol lawn mower but we see here something very different in that God in choosing to use us as his instruments has no regrets in the fact that he calls us to be his witnesses because notice this it is by man that death enters into this world and it is by this God man that resurrection comes into this world and it is also by man that this glorious gospel will be proclaimed.

And so you can probably imagine maybe the look on Satan's face when he sees these apostles these young Christians these are who you've chosen to defeat me in the same way that maybe Goliath would have looked at David.

You think your way your plan will succeed with these individuals but yet we see that the power of God is glorified in the insignificance of his agents by whom he will achieve everlasting victory.

And so know this that it pleases God to use you. It pleases God to use you in his mission in the same way that it pleases a father to teach his children new skills.

[15:07] Thinking back my house in the States had these big hickory trees in the back garden that in the fall it would just in autumn it would just dump these leaves and nuts all over the garden and it would take weeks upon weeks to blow and rake and haul them to the street.

But one of the pleasure that it was for me when I did this is when my children would come outside and try to help and they were small at the time so not very effective in raking or gathering leaves. In fact their time outside with me slowed down the progress of my work.

But it was a blessing to me because I see them develop this skill and we were able to spend time together. And so Charles Spurgeon he puts it this way he says the Lord Jesus takes great pleasure in the attempts of his servants to seek and save souls for they are learning to be shepherds like himself.

And so we don't need to be afraid of our inadequacies we don't need to be ashamed of our poor track record. God desires to use you and me for the advancement of his gospel.

And so this is the calling that these apostles receive. Notice then where they are called to go. It says in verse 20 to go stand in the temple courts tell the people all about this new life.

[16:23] We need to understand that the temple this was the center of national and religious life for the Jewish people. It's where they worshipped it's where they met people it's where they shared news it's where teaching was done.

And so you may think well the apostles after the broken eye jail they've been arrested a few times now they may want to not go right into the center of the temple to preach this good news. Maybe like some back streets maybe some private homes and be a little more cautious about how they advance the gospel but the angel is very clear here he wants the gospel to be made known in the most conspicuous way possible.

Go where you're going to have the greatest impact where the most people are going to hear you.

And so I think a question for us is what's the equivalent of the temple in our day and age.

Certainly we want to preach the gospel in churches but we know that the church is no longer the center of Scottish society so where can we expect to go? We cannot expect everyone in this city to come through these doors that they may hear the gospel.

It is us who must take the gospel to our city. And so what does this look like? We take the gospel to our schools and to our universities.

[17:35] We share the love of Christ with our classmates. We provide a hopeful alternative to the secularism of academia. We take the gospel to our sports teams and to our clubs.

We share the love of Jesus in word and in deed with those who share our common interests. We take the gospel into the political arena. We defend a Christian worldview from those who seek to destroy it.

Quite literally we take the gospel to the pubs and to the cafes. There's no, I mean, are they not what's closest to us of what the temple was?

Thinking of one of these test questions that I had from the Life in the UK test, there was tons of questions about pubs that I had to study. What time they open? How old can you be there? How late are they served? Even thinking about culture, one of the questions was this, what is a traditional part of British culture that is often used as a place for socializing and entertainment? The pub. Where do people go to worship the idols of sports and pleasure? Where do they go when they're sad and depressed? Where do they go to meet friends and share news?

[18:48] Quite honestly, in my time here in the UK, the best place that I have found to engage strangers in conversation has been the pub. So I dare say, if Jesus lived today, he may spend more time in the pub than either you or I do.

You may say, yeah, I mean, this is what Jesus says, right? He says that the Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, he's a glutton, he's a drunkard, he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners. My point is this, we need to always be looking for opportunities to inject the gospel into our culture.

Each of us has different connections and different backgrounds, different skills, different interests, may we use them as magnetic points in which we can connect with the culture around us.

May the gospel so infuse our lives that it overflows into our activities and our relationship that others can't help but see the Jesus work in our lives.

And so that brings us to our second point. We are called to go. What is the message that we take? Look in verse 20 again. Go stand in the temples, in the temple courts, and tell the people all about

this new life.

[20 : 03] I don't think that the ESV is probably the greatest translation of this line. Literally it says in the Greek to speak to the people all the words of this life. And that Greek word for life is capitalized.

So we're not talking just about any words of life, we're talking about the words of the life. and it should remind us then of the beginning of the gospel of John which says, in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

In him was life and that life was the light of all men. Jesus says this himself in John 11, 25, I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. The words of life that we share then is the good news of Jesus.

And this is exactly what we see Peter do in front of the Jewish leaders. He says in verse 28, we must obey God rather than human beings. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead who you killed by hanging on the cross.

[21 : 10] God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgiveness of sins. This is the good news that we share.

That the son of man made himself nothing. That he was obedient to death on the cross but the grave could not contain him. And now we have a ruler, a savior who rules and reigns and we then are witnesses of this marvelous transformation.

From death to life. From weakness to power. From shame to honor. A cursed man on a tree. Now a saving prince. At the right hand of God.

And so we recognize that this savior he gives, he comes bearing gifts of repentance and forgiveness. Again the NIV it says bring, he brings us to repentance.

In the Greek it actually says he gives repentance. So he's not giving the opportunity to repent. He is actually giving repentance as a gift. It is a gift of God when you repent.

[22 : 15] repent. And that literally means to change your mind. God. And so I think this is important because we're talking about sharing this good news but you may not be one who has actually received this good news.

And so it's important to know that you do not need to change your mind in order to be accepted by God. You don't need to clean up your act in order that God will be pleased with you.

No, God gives you what you need in order to be saved. He gives you repentance and forgiveness. He quite literally changes your mind and places you on the path of life turning you away from the path of destruction.

Because a dead man can't make himself alive. He must be given these words of life. And we see that this offer of life is given to the very men who nailed Jesus to that cross.

And so that same message, that same offer of repentance and forgiveness is extended to you as well. And so I urge you to receive this gift, to turn from your evil ways to believe in the saving work of Jesus, to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit that your sins may be cleansed and you may walk in obedience to God.

[23 : 37] This gift of salvation is grace. It is grace from beginning to end. And so for those of us who have received this gift, do we go through our day with this sense of urgency that when we look around all those around us, our classmates, our co-workers, those we pass on the street, that those that don't know Christ are dead in their sins and deserving of eternal punishment.

that's really a sobering reality. And I think oftentimes we may try to ignore it or it makes it difficult for us to share this truth.

But notice what the angel says in his commands. He says, speak to the people all the words of this life. And so that includes making known the bad news so that people will be attracted to the good news.

Without the reality of death, there is no need for Jesus' life. And so we don't preach a gospel of improvement. We don't preach a gospel of trying harder.

We preach a gospel of resurrection. We preach that Jesus came to save hopeless and helpless sinners like you and me. And that brings us to our final point then.

[24 : 53] What's the result when we are faithfully proclaimed this message? Well, if we've never read this passage before and we hear about this angel coming and releasing the apostles from prison and he tells them to go preach in the temple, we may think something big is going to happen here.

This angel knows more than what we do here. So likely something is going to change. These religious leaders are going to, their eyes are going to be open. They're going to recognize who the one true Lord and Savior is.

But what we see is quite opposite, right? When they hear the gospel proclaimed, their hearts only grow harder in the desire to kill the apostles. So you may be left asking, well, why didn't it work? Did the power of the gospel fail? Did Peter not speak the right words? Did he not have enough power and conviction in how he spoke? The message didn't seem to have its intended effect. But then we arrive at the very end of our passage in verse 41 and 42. And we see that the apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name.

[25 : 59] 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. We see that the immediate result of gospel proclamation was not the conversion of sinners, but the persecution of saints.

And this is what led them to boldness in their faith. So we may think, well, this is, we always want to find points of application in a sermon, right? But we don't face persecution like this.

Our lives, our physical health is not at risk. I mean, at the very worst, what do we experience? Awkwardness? An abrupt end to a conversation? Not persecution.

And I think that we need to ask the question, well, why not? Because if we look over the arc of the history of the church, it's been marked by bloodshed and persecution. I mean, Christ said that the Christian life is hard, that you need to be, expect to be mocked and despised.

And so why do we in our day and age face this relative peace? I wonder if it's, we experience so little conflict between the church and societies because oftentimes there's so little difference between the two.

[27 : 19] Is the church, are we simply content to teach and proclaim morality? Or do we willingly proclaim the offense of the cross?

As Christians, are we just so often just wanting to fit in? Or are we willing to stand out and be distinct for our faith? And I know in this culture, we can be very conflict-averse.

We don't want to rock the boat. We want to go along to get along. But what if we realize the blessing and the benefit that came through persecution? This is what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

He said, Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven.

For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. And so we see there's great blessing and benefit that comes from persecution. We see this as we continue on in the book of Acts.

[28 : 24] How is there benefit in persecution? It leads believers to pray and to praise. We recognize that we are not on our own in this task. We have the power of the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ's Spirit himself who is with us.

So maybe long for it in prayer. We see that it helps believers recognize the sovereignty of God. Conversion isn't dependent on our efforts. It is God who draws people to himself.

And so as we share this good news we don't need to be worried about the results because God will save who he wills. We see also that persecution allows believers to stand in solidarity with Christ's sufferings.

Because this is what Jesus said. He said if they persecuted me they're also going to persecute you. He calls us to take up our cross and follow after him. I think ultimately what we see here is that persecution leads to the growth of the church.

Tertullian who was a second century church father who lived when persecution toward Christians may have been at its height when believers were beaten and whipped and sawed in half and thrown into fire and fed to lions is he who said the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.

[29 : 40] and so do we truly want to see the church grow? What if we were to pray for persecution? That we may have the courage to step out of our comfortable little Christian bubbles and joyfully and eagerly share the good news of Jesus even in the midst of opposition.

because just like that black prince who received honor through victory in a battle that seemed to be lost may we respond with the same level of courage and commitment that we can say and respond just as these apostles did that we may receive honor that it may be an honor to be dishonored and

a grace to be disgraced.

A bit of irony in the story in this passage that we read today is that truth that we see actually comes from this Pharisee Gamaliel. He opposed this Christian movement but it's interesting what he urges the Jewish leaders he says leave these men alone let them go for if their purpose or activity is of human origin it will fail but if it's from God you will not be able to stop these men and to that we can say a hearty amen because we fight from a position of victory the battle has already been won and so may God receive his glory may we share in his honor as we seek to advance his kingdom do you