

Acts 5:17–42

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[0 : 00] through 42 and may be found on page 1011 of the White Bibles. Again, the passage is Acts 5, 17 to 42, page 1011. Would you please stand with me for the reading of God's word?

But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.

Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. And someone came and told them, Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.

[1 : 23] Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And when they had brought them, they set before them the council.

And the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charge you not to teach in this name, Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.

God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.

[2 : 22] And he said to them, Men of Israel, take care of what you are about to do with these men. For before these days, Thutis rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him.

He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

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. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.

You might even be found opposing God. So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

[3 : 29] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may receive it. Thank you. Thank you. Well, good morning. I'd like to add my own greetings to you, especially those of you who might be visiting with us today or just coming on to returning to church and maybe even the holidays of

Christmas, sparking your mind and interest to consider, again, the fresh things of God.

And I hope you'll return tonight at the loft, which is above Salonica's. Just as we open our day in praise to the Lord, we will close our day in prayer to him as well.

And I look forward, especially tonight, to two of our congregants, both Marcus Mitchell and Marcos Gavea, from their own experience in prayer, helping to lead and teach us.

So look forward to seeing you at the loft tonight at 7:30. If you enjoyed the offertory today, you'll want to purchase tickets to Christmas on the town so you can hear it again and bring your friends. That is the kind of music that goes on, and we're going to make that contribution from our own congregation. So please invite some friends to what will be a wonderful evening.

[4 : 54] And in fact, two Sundays from now, we're going to have a Christmas choir here made up of congregants in our midst. So if you're interested in being part of our Christmas choir on a Sunday morning for the 17th and singing of the glories of the gospel, just talk to me or Tim Humerson after the service today.

we'd like to enlarge that Advent singing into our midst. Well, let me pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we now turn our attention to this word that you have given to us, believing that in these moments you do intend to speak to us.

And so may it be a centerpiece of our mind and heart to be fully and devotedly given to what this text would bring to us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I suppose, given the length of the reading, I'd like to give you the lay of the sermon. If I were to title it by way of emphasis, I hope you will see the unrelenting persistence of teaching about Jesus.

[6 : 17] The unrelenting persistence of the role of teaching about Jesus. The sermon will move in three parts, really.

The first given to the setting of this text, which is Jerusalem, and more especially, the early activity in the book of Acts centered around the temple and what the apostles were doing in the outer court, which is called Solomon's portico.

All of that setting is vibrant and will be laid out for you. And then the text divides into two simple scenes. The first is the scene that takes you to a jail cell and the second to a judicial courtroom. So there it is. And I should tell you of this, I am sure, concerning the setting of our text, the pulsating energy and the spiritual vibe that would have been played in and around Jerusalem and especially in and around the activity of the temple as our text opens was unlike anything you or I have ever experienced.

I don't know how to paint this setting for you other than to say something to the effect if you are a high school student and you receive tickets to Lollapalooza, the setting of this context is more vibrant and intriguing than that week in our city.

[7 : 56] It's more captivating than those of you who are Blackhawks fans rushing downtown to be part of a corporate parade in celebration of a hockey title.

For what happens in those events captivates a few people depending upon your interest. But the setting of our text overwhelmed an entire city.

The events that had transpired from chapters 1 through 4 encapsulated the attention of every single citizen in and around Jerusalem.

Let me show it to you in three ways. Look at the setting there in our previous paragraph which he's trying to lay out in verse 12. All the miraculous signs and wonders that have been done among the people by the hands of the apostles in the shadow of, there it is, Solomon's portico.

Solomon's portico was this elongated stretch of space that was pillared three deep with an awning-like structure for an overhang where people could get in and out from under the sun.

[9 : 13] And it was lengthy, large. And the events that had taken place by that time in the text is this area of the city had been overwhelmed with the swells of men and women and for good reason.

Solomon's portico really had the advantage of the apostles in the sense of its location. It could accommodate crowds the size that were coming.

And not every place in the ancient world could have done that. And it also had the advantage of being directly adjacent by way of a perpendicular line to the rising temple itself.

It was part of the whole temple but by way of being an outer court. But rising right on its edge is the temple. And within it, its court of women.

And the inner sanctums where the Levites lived and were housed while on duty. And indeed, even the Holy of Holies. And so here it is in the centerpiece of all of their religious life.

[10:23] It sits where all the people have access. And not only that, right next to where the high priests and all of the Levites are conducting ancient Israel's forms of worship.

Josephus himself indicates that the space of this temple, outer courts included, was somewhere on the range of between 26 to 35 acres of land.

This is a large space. And that space had been overrun with people. Notice the size.

Not just Solomon's portico, but the size of the crowds that were coming. The setting in verse 13 of chapter 5 indicates that more than ever, verse 14, more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

More than ever, multitudes. And if you look back to chapter 4, and you look back at chapter 4, verse 4, you will find that at that point, many of those who heard the word believed were numbering about 5,000.

[11:36] And if you trace it back to chapter 2, at Pentecost, you had 3,000. So you take the 3,000, I'm no mathematician, but you take the 3,000, you number them now to over 5,000, and you indicate in our text that more than ever, multitudes of both men and women are professing the faith.

You have a spontaneous combustion of people energy that are density-like living under Solomon's portico, 5,000 to 10,000 to 12,000 people depending upon the day.

And not only the size of the crowds that were beginning to gather, but think about what that meant. That area in the temple would have been previously filled with stalls where you could purchase your sacrifices, where well-meaning, pietist individuals would come, and they would get what they needed, and then walk right across to the temple, and offer it to the Levites, who would then offer their sin offerings before the Lord.

That had all been overrun. In fact, people aren't buying the sacrifices anymore, and all the stalls which were under the watch of no one other than Annas, the high priest, they were listening instead to the apostolic teaching.

So it's an open-air environment with a crescendoing echo of that portico providing the sound and in walled. Imagine what it would have been like.

[13:03] I remember the day when I was in Brussels for a two-hour layover with one of my sons, and we wanted to see the great plaza, the great square in Brussels. And we had two hours, and the people in our airplane told us, don't leave the airport, you won't have time to get back.

We looked at each other, smiled, and made a run for it. And we got on the train platform, we got right down into Brussels where we knew that great plaza was because I'd never been there. And we got off, and we ran into that plaza, and it was cavernous, glorious.

The sun was rising, and it was empty. A couple of street sweepers, and that was it. I've been to Old Havana in Cuba with its diminutive but glorious plaza, and I've been there early morning having breakfast when no one was around, and I've also been there when it's filled.

So you can imagine on the day that our text opens, the crowds that had begun to swell in those contexts from early morning to late at night, they were there. Remember, the outer court where Solomon's portico was was not locked at night.

Indeed, the ancient texts and rabbinic sources tell us that people were able to sleep there. And notice the kind of people that are now there. The kind of people that are there according to the setting.

[14:21] In verses 15, they are the sick that have been hauled into streets, laid on cots and mats, hoping to just get the shadow of Peter as he comes and goes during the day.

They are people now, according to verse 16, that have come from around Jerusalem. All the energy is moving, pulsating to this place long before social media could bring them there.

And they were bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits. spirits. This is why I'm trying to say to you, the setting of our text is unlike anything you or I have ever experienced.

Signs, wonders, healings, a population that's transfixed on the apostles and their teaching. You have men and women who are bringing their sick and laying them perhaps outside the beautiful gate where that single lame beggar was that started it all in chapter 3.

in hopes that maybe Peter or the apostles would pass that way in or out. How can I get close enough to hear, to see, to be changed by what was taking place in the city on that day?

[15 : 38] What an alteration from one lame beggar at a gate to a city and a portico outside the temple where the sick are now present.

You know what I'm talking about. Where the bodily smells are rising. And it's not from the underground pipes of Chicago that you pass by.

It's actually people. And the unclean spirits and the demonic voices are being, are rising in the midst. I mean, it is almost like absolute chaos.

Glorious chaos. The setting, of course, would have presented a security issue as well.

While we know that the rabbinic, from rabbinic sources that the outer court was never locked at night, from the Mishnah and the tractate medot, we know that the temple itself in which the Levites lived while on duty and the Holy of Holies was situated and the sacrifices were offered was indeed locked down nightly by those who lived within.

[17 : 00] this is what we read from the Mishnah. The young priests had each his mattress on the ground and there was a place there, one cubit square, whereon lay a slab of marble in which was fixed a ring and a chain on which hung the keys.

When the time was come to lock up the temple, he lifted up the slab by the ring and took the keys from the chain and the priest locked the gates from inside while a Levite slept outside.

And when he finished locking the gates, he put the keys on the chain and the slab in its place, put his mattress over it and went to sleep. All of that would have taken place as our text opens.

I'm reminded of being in London some 20 years ago and attending what is called the ceremony of the keys. The Tower of London which houses all of the prime jewels of the empire gets locked down every night and has been locked down for over 700 years each and every night without fail even in the midst of the bombings during World War II.

And so those who were charged with the crown jewels would come into the presence of the night time and the century would hear someone approaching from the inside who was at the gate with the gates opened and say, Hail!

[18 : 41] Who comes there? And the yeoman warder would cry out the keys! And they would say, Whose keys? Queen Elizabeth's keys!

And then the warden would say, Pass by all is well. And they still allow a handful of people every night to go inside the Tower of London and watch that take place and you, like those who are charged with the tower, are locked in.

Well, they let you out through a side door when the ceremony's over. But you can imagine when our text opens, that temple's locked down, thousands of people are on the other side of the wall, the rabble has arrived, and the poor Levite who has to sleep on the outer stairwell as the night passes. That gives way to everything you need to know to get into verse 17 and to know why it was that the jail cell becomes the first scene.

But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles. Notice the apostles no longer merely Peter and John.

[20 : 04] This is 12 in number. Matthias has some work to do. And his first apostolic call is to attend with the other 11 an arrest, and with the arrest to be placed in the public prison.

And there we are. And with that, I'm sure the high priest went to bed. Because the temple was secure, and the apostles were under lock and key.

And their hope, of course, was that we could dissipate this citywide conflict and bring back to normalcy this Solomon's portico, which had become the apostolic place that in a sense resembled the march on Wall Street that had disrupted everything.

Take a look. With the city finally at peace, your scene reads this way, verse 19, but during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. The unrelenting persistence of teaching about Jesus.

[21 : 49] Now, just think about what just happened in those verses. It is stunning. You move in one evening from the jail cell to Jesus.

To muting the apostles to the message going forth through them. I mean, it would have been 12 preachers that all wanted to preach at the same time and who knows, maybe they did because the space was large enough.

You go take those few hundred over there. I'm taking these few hundred here. I don't know. Or maybe it was more like it's preaching time and one by one they tag in and out on another as the 12 proclaim about Jesus.

And notice what they're proclaiming that he is life. This very phrase life is really the largest conception you can think of of all the Old Testament concerning what would be equated to salvation.

To have salvation in the Old Testament was to have life. To have life was to have the salvation that God offers. And they are now attaching life to Jesus by daybreak.

[22 : 56] Now we also know that as they begin proclaiming the unrelenting teaching of Jesus as life at that moment according to the rabbinic sources and Josephus and other aspects of literature the temple itself was being unlocked for the morning sacrifice.

J. Julius Scott former professor at Wheaton College now retired indicates that each day near dawn the priests who had slept in the temple were summoned an officer cast lots to determine priestly responsibilities those priests who had been selected for duty that day washed their hands and feet the others were dismissed ashes were removed from the bronze altar worship began when daylight arrived the lamps were cleaned fresh oil put in them ashes removed incense lit and the temple doors opened to indicate the beginning of worship at which point according to the Torah a sacrificial lamb was offered daily so here comes the lamb now receiving water from a golden basin then being killed to open the day with praise and thanksgiving and a sacrificial blood covering for the people and all of that is underway indeed when it was done there would be a reciting of the Shema there would be benedictions there would be other prayers there would be actually a particular psalm read for which day of the week it was and then of course stunningly the priest would stand on the steps of the temple and deliver the name of God the divine name and so here it is

Israel's worship standing through blood sacrifices daily opening the gates of their worship and the voice coming out on the divine name and the apostles adjacent with throngs already there at daylight preaching Jesus as life what a stunning scene jail could not contain the proclamation of the gospel think of it some of you have been in jail amen amen some of you I know and some of you have proclaimed Jesus having come out of jail amen and some of you who've been released from jail going back into jail to proclaim Jesus as life I'll never forget the glorious day I was able to stand in a large penitentiary in Florida and to go back through gate after gate barbed wire after barbed wire and to see a man actually baptized in a little kiddie pool because the gospel was being proclaimed in the depth of the cells so we try to find our way into jail with the gospel but on this night from jail the world is given the gospel where does the gospel come from from a jail cell this is it they're standing they're teaching

Jesus as life what a scene what a daybreak and then we have this wonderful humorous narrative of what that day must have been like from those who had all the religious power it's right there verses 21b through 26 I mean you can't read it without smiling or laughing now the high priest came and those who were with him and they called together the council now notice the council is now the the Sanhedrin these are the 70 in number who would have been clothed in their robes of dignity that like ancient Israel's practice where there were 70 elders who went up on the mountain with Moses in intertestamental times there were 70 people who were elected to serve as the religious heads of the whole religious worship

Sadducees were one group among them as were Pharisees there was also another group Josephus gives us concerning the Aseans but here they are the august deliberative judicial body is now arriving and being seated in the halls of hewn stone it's a courtroom and here they go and they are ready now to take the men that they put in jail the night before having opened the world to their own worship just moments ago and yet humorously here it is verse 22 but when the officers came they did not find them in prison so they returned and reported we found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors you know what that is don't you that's covering somebody's tail if you're going to go tell the high priest that they're not in there you need to know this you better tell them that door was locked not open and you better tell them the captain and the guards were all here we weren't derelict on our duty and so having listed that out we were there it was locked but when we opened the door nobody was inside verse 24 when the captain of the temple the chief priest heard these words these are these robed judicial men seated in their chairs semi-circular they're greatly perplexed wondering what this would come to and someone just in the midst of that somebody walks in and says excuse me attorneys lawyers judicial body the guys who locked up

they're on the other side of this wall they're back out there at Solomon's Portico you're killing that lamb and pronouncing the divine name they're right back where you arrested them and thousands are listening to a sunrise service and it's not even Easter what humor look 25 the men who put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people then the captain with the officer

[29 : 29] I bet the captain went on his own this time captain said well I'll go check this out and they go and they went and they brought them that is the 12 apostles right into the judicial courtroom but they did so nicely for fear of being stoned which by way is a very different contrast in the language than the way in which they arrested them in verse 18 when they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison the literal construction there is in a sense they laid their hands on them I mean they pulled these guys into jail and yet they escorted them into the courtroom notice what happens neither does a jail cell keep the teaching of Jesus from the people but a judicial courtroom will not limit the teaching to those who are in religious power notice how they try to have all the power verses 27 and following the high priest questioned them we strictly charge you not to teach in this name and yet here you filled with Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us

I mean this is an actual trial but Peter and the apostles answered we must obey God rather than men the God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed this is a strong witness here by hanging him on the tree God exalted him at the right hand as leader and savior notice the change in terms now we move from Jesus as life in the jail cell scene to Jesus as leader and savior in the judicial court and it says here to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins we are witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him Jesus himself had said in Luke chapter 12 don't worry when you come before the leaders because the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say and they have now proclaimed decently and in good order Jesus in the midst of power savior leader and they're actually saying by the way you told us not to talk in his name you tried to put the gag order on us and I'm telling you we're not gagged and there's forgiveness for you there's an offer here of salvation to them in other words there's an implication that guys

I know you're on the other side of the bench but in actual fact you're on trial not me but thank God for you that Jesus might forgive you that's fearless no wonder no wonder they say when they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them just as the jail scene is interrupted in the narrative with humor before you arrive at the judicial courtroom so too the judicial courtroom is interrupted in a narrative not from an officer giving a report but from a trusted teacher in Israel concerning now what to do and so here he comes on the scene a Pharisee of the council a teacher of the law one held in honor by all the people and he actually says I think the court needs to recess we need to take these 12 men aside and I'd like to go into private session and he goes into private session and he indicates by two examples that you better be careful what to do next now I know historically as an aside

Josephus also mentions these two men's names and places them in a different arc on the history of the incidents but Josephus also mentions people like Judas I think he's got 12 different Judas's that are insurrectionists in the early period of the church and there could have just as easily been other men with the name of Theodos as well and so here we are two examples about men who rose up claiming to be somebody and yet when they died the people finally fell off and so the admonition the advice of the great teacher in Israel is don't mess with these men it'll die out or worse yet it's supposed to gain light and if so then you're actually standing in the way of God so they bring the men back in and the 70 are perplexed they take his advice and counsel it says verse 40 and they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go get it get it now because we're winding up the jail cell could not contain the persistent teaching of

Jesus the judicial challenge in court would not limit their persistent teaching of Jesus and a legally binding injunction to refrain from going on in the name of Jesus followed by the corporal punishment of a beating which according to the Torah could have been up to at least 39 lashes depending upon the offense was delivered also could not keep the gospel from going forward imagine it 12 men on the ground lash by lash by lash if it was 39 we're talking quite a beating 39 lashes 12 times over that such was the threat and they let him go and look at the response then they left the presence of the council rejoicing rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name and every day in the temple and from house to house they did not cease teaching and preaching that the

[36 : 07] Christ is Jesus there's another wonderful term of Christmas not only is Jesus life not only is Jesus savior not only is Jesus leader but in this exchange he is Christ Christ is Jesus the one that had all the anointed promises of the Hebrew scriptures was going to be proclaimed and notice the way he does it it's lyrical it's beautiful every day in the temple and from house to house they did not cease every day in every place from everywhere the name of Jesus came off from the mountaintops what a scene what a setting what an emphasis how about you how about me you have the freedom to speak the name of Jesus

Lord have mercy very few of us have been squelched by those who have power or authority but even if we were we had the freedom to speak the name of Jesus Lord have mercy nobody's come to me yet told me I can't teach in his name nobody's beaten me nobody's hauled me in nobody's walked me out nobody's worked me over I have the privilege of announcing Jesus Lord have mercy the emphasis in the three dynamic exchanges in the text call for the persistent unrelenting unending unceasing daily rejoicing rejoicing proclamation of

Jesus every day from every place with unending persistence it was true for them it was the cause for the growth of the gospel it ought to be true for us why is the church so impoverished today we've fallen silent on Jesus our heavenly father we now pray that with advent coming and the arrival of our lord in our in our view we pray that we would come to him today through this table and go forth through these doors which are not locked into a world that we would proclaim that which we know in Jesus name amen