

Acts 5:17-42: You Blind You

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah. It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, we confess before you, because we're sort of in a bit of a good space, we confess before you, Father, that we are prone to sometimes see specks in other people's eyes and not notice the log in our own eyes, that we are sometimes not at all self-aware of who we are. We thank you, Father, that your Word is both a mirror that helps us to see ourselves, a light that helps us to see ourselves, and it's also a window, and that by your light we can look out that window and learn more of you and more of ourselves. So Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would gently bring your Word deeply into our hearts this morning, and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

So some of you know that I was a priest, a presbyter, in the Anglican Church of Canada for over 22 years, and one of the things that you did as a presbyter is you'd have a meeting once a month called Clericus. It was where all of the clergy in a certain region would get together. You'd do that like you wouldn't meet in July and August and maybe not meet in December or something like that. So you know, it'd be eight, nine, ten times a year. And when I was in Ottawa Centre, that was where I was last, you might wonder what did we do when we all got together once a month? Well, what we did or what happened is they mainly talked about politics, and namely at the time about how bad the government was or how bad this policy was or whatever. And they probably would have said, I didn't join in very much. I was usually in a minority position when it came to what they thought was terrible or what they thought was spectacularly good. They would have seen it as being, of course, prophetic and biblical and, you know, blah, blah, woof, woof. But that's what we talked about.

We didn't talk about the Bible, or if we did, it would quickly veer into political issues of the day. I mention this because the text that we're going to be looking at this morning, if I'm not careful with myself, I could talk a lot about politics. This would be one of those texts that could be used as a springboard to talk about all sorts of political things. And given that a lot of the people in this room have political opinions, it might very well be that in coffee time afterwards, you can talk about some of these political things, but you can pray that I don't, that we'll look at some other things in the text which are very important. But by the way, let's look at the text.

[3 : 53] So if you have your Bibles, it's Acts chapter 5, verses 17 and following. Acts chapter 5, verses 17 and following. And what's just happened, you know, there was a, we spent several weeks, a story of God uses, you know, Peter and John have a man healed in the name of Jesus who's never been able to walk. It draws a crowd. They do a sermon. They go and they get thrown in jail. They get let out. They, you know, and then after they get let out, they tell everybody about what happened in the congregation, rather than being frightened, is encouraged, the people. And then last week we looked at the terrifying story of God striking Ananias and Sapphira dead. But despite that, that the church grew. And now this is the next story. Now, the book of Acts is an eyewitness-based history of the first 30-some-odd years of the Christmas, the Christmas, the Christmas movement, the Jesus movement. And we don't know how long after the last event, this event happened. It might have just been a couple of weeks. It might have been a couple of months. Most scholars think that the person that we now know of as Paul, but at the time was called Saul, and we're going to meet him in a couple of weeks, that he probably became a Christian probably in the year 34. It might be 35, might even be the end of 33. It depends a little bit on when the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus happened, whether it was the year 30 or 33.

But if Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead in the year 33, then, you know, maybe within about a year of that, Paul becomes a Christian. And so this, we know that this isn't like two or three or four or five years after, because Paul is still not in the picture.

But a couple of months later, it's not specific, this particular event happens, and here's how it goes. Verse 17. 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.

Now, just a couple of things here. I read a lot of novels with cops and all of that, and one of the things they talk about in those American novels, I don't know how many of you are familiar with it, is this idea of the perp walk. And if you don't know what a perp walk is, there's two different versions of it. But what happens is, if the police want to embarrass you, or somebody in the police, you know, community wants to embarrass you, it would be as if they were going to arrest me for some reason. And they don't want to just arrest me, they don't want to pull up to my house at 10 o'clock at night and arrest me, just privately. They'd come into the service. And not only would they come into the service to arrest me, they'd make sure that Global News and CTV and CFRA and other groups like that knew that I was going to be arrested, and the reporters would be all there. Or after I'd been charged, as I'm leaving the court, after having been charged, the police would have leaked to people that I'm being, when I'm leaving, so that the press could take pictures of me. And it's a way to further embarrass the people who've been charged, type of a power play. And that's what's going on here. It's more obvious in the original language that it's not just that they arrest the apostles and put them in jail, but they do it in a very public way to show their power. Now, a couple of things that are going on here in the text, and it's one of the reasons that Canadians have a hard time with understanding books like Acts and what's just happened, is, well, I think if you were to look, I bet that Gaza, under Hamas, has laws. I bet they're all written down. I bet if you went to

Syria, and you looked, they have laws. How many people think that Hamas cares what the laws say? Or in Syria, that they care what the laws say? Or in China? I could keep naming countries.

[8 : 02] The fact of the matter is that there might be laws, but the real law is that the powerful do whatever they want. And if you piss off the powerful, they'll arrest you. That's, in fact, how it is for the majority of the people who live on this planet today, and it's how most people throughout history have lived, where basically if you upset the powerful, they'll arrest you.

It doesn't matter what the laws are, and that's what's going on here. They're powerful people. The apostles representing the Christians are massively, massively, massively bothering them.

In fact, it's even more than that in a moment. And so they just go ahead and arrest them. And one of the things that we have problems with when we look at it, we think, okay, well, what law did they break? In fact, even when I read commentaries, they talk about whether they've broken law. No, no, you guys don't understand it. They didn't break any laws. They just said, you're not allowed to do this. Why? Well, you're not allowed to do this. The why is because I'm the boss. That's why. And because I'm the boss, you're not allowed to do it. Like, it's as simple as that.

It doesn't matter what the laws say. Now, what this says here in this particular text, so here, that's the world they're living in. So it's very likely that, for instance, we might have a bit of a problem with it. And if we have commentators writing from our perspective, they try to look at what laws might or might not have been broken. And I'm reading them and think, you guys don't know anything. You know, I can be opinionated when I'm reading commentaries.

I just think to myself, I bet a commentator in China wouldn't ask that question, because they just know how the world works. But here's the other part, and it's really important for the rest of the story. You'll notice again in verse 17, they were filled with jealousy. Now, that word in the original language is sort of a, it includes three or a couple of different areas, and there's no really proper English word for it. It's a sort of a rare word. It only occurs one other place in the New Testament. What it's talking about is religiously or ideologically motivated rage.

[10:07] Religiously or ideologically motivated rage. They're not just jealous. They are consumed with rage. And the rage is driven by religious and or ideological purposes. Another way to understand it is that they are filled with a punitive zeal. They are filled with zeal to punish.

Another way to understand it is they have been consumed with fierceness of indignation. Another way to understand it is they are filled with envy. An envy that wants to punish.

And that's what's all being captured with this simple word, jealousy, but what's there in the original language. Now, this is very, very, this is a profound human problem.

And it's made worse when you have power. It doesn't matter whether it's political power, social power, religious power, cultural power, family power, maybe a power of a husband over a wife, or in some cases a wife over a husband. And so what is envy? Envy is, envy is one of those sins that we don't often recognize that we have, and it's not talked about very much in our culture.

It's sort of a perversion of good ambition. So good ambition would be, you know, one of you is a lawyer. And you look at some other lawyer, and you just marvel at how skilled she is.

[11:57] And you think to yourself, I'd love, like that, she's such a good lawyer. Like the way she handles questions, her knowledge of the case law, that her knowledge of the law, the way she handles things, the way she handles things in court.

Or, I'd love to be a lawyer like that someday. Or maybe somebody in the civil service, and you, you know, you see your boss's boss's boss, and you see how they handle meetings, and how they handle conflict, and how they handle staff.

And you say to yourself, you know, I'd really like to be like that. I'd really like to be like him someday. You know, maybe even, you know, could I call them or talk to them and maybe get some pointers.

But I'm just going to be like that person someday. Or maybe you know, I'd really like to be like that person someday.

You know, for me, it would be like, I'd really like to be able to preach like that man, or lead like that man, or counsel like that person. But instead, I'd look at that person, and I say, I'm just as good as him.

[13 : 03] I'm just as good as her and the fact that I think I'm just as good as them and they're getting those things that I don't have fills me with envy and at the heart of envy I want to bring them down I want to knock them down not just one peg or two peg I'd love to see them humiliated I can get to the point where I'd like to see them lose everything you see it's not even a zero something that I could take their position and they could be down it wouldn't matter if I get any type of position or get any better as long as they get destroyed as long as they get completely and utterly gone and those are very powerful things and obviously those are extreme things but it's what envy can grow into and so what we see here it's in a sense a combination of envy and anger and anger is the same type of thing and one of the things about both envy and anger is that one of the reasons there's such profound human problems is we often don't recognize them in ourselves

I've had talks with people who have been angry and gosh I mean you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that they're angry their face is red they're gripping the seat or whatever or maybe their hands are shaking and you say you know I think you're angry they say no I'm not in a really angry way I yell it right back at you no I'm not angry you know by the way I always recognize my envy and my anger and I'm just joking I'm you know here's the thing about this text which is so powerful and it's if you remember this especially for the book of Acts but all the way through narratives is that the book of Acts every text in the book of Acts is both a mirror and a window it's a mirror and a window it's a way to see ourselves but it's also a way to see hope to see who God is and it's always both at the same time and what we need to understand and one of the reasons that the Bible and the biblical one of the reasons I love Christianity it's so beautiful and it's so powerful is that the Bible doesn't other other people so it's not here the way to interpret this text is not to say oh yeah look at those bad people look at those bad people we're the good people look at those bad people that's what happens when you have power that you know look at those you know whatever look at those Jewish people or look at those millionaires or there were billionaires or those deputy ministers no the fact of the matter is is that when we're reading the text of the story we're not just to say how bad these people in power are we are to ask ourselves is it me Lord like do I have an anger problem do I have an envy problem

I might think that I'm concerned with justice I'm concerned with I'm concerned with the good running of the organization but is it in fact that that's not really the case that what really is going on is that I have envy and I would be just as happy if things didn't work very well as long as that person gets kicked out of their position is that me and the text doesn't just dump on you you see that's what was so wonderful that when you read the biblical narratives and you read them in light of the gospel then you see because on one hand I am sometimes these people I am sometimes angry and envious and I am sometimes blind to it but I'm also sometimes like the apostles you see and that's why the thing which is so powerful about these biblical narratives is that they when you understand them as a mirror and a window and when as you read them in light of the gospel the comfort that the gospel gives you you can look at those different aspects of yourself and not just get caught in othering people or just patting yourself on the back as if you're just unbelievably brilliant all of the time and that's just the way it has to be or both but what's going on here is a very powerful case of anger and envy and we'll see that as the text goes on and we'll see how it works as the text goes on so and so actually what's going to happen next is you can ask me about it over coffee or if you're watching this online you can send me an email maybe I could have a chat with you

I'm not going to defend it I believe the next bit happened I don't think there's anything problematic with the next thing happening but what happens next let's look verse 19 so the apostles are arrested they're put in public prison verse 19 but during the night but during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out the angels obviously also made the guards fall asleep or whatever and said the angel says to the apostles go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life this life and that's really interesting because it shows that one of the ways that the early Christians understood themselves is that they were followers of the life and it's really important to understand that that's what Christianity offers us it offers us life it offers us a perspective to be thankful for the gift of life for ourselves the gift of life for others it's a way for us to understand that when Jesus comes into our lives that what he offers us is life that we begin to get his life eternal life life of the future in our lives right now and that when we die it is not the end of us but that we walk into greater life in a sense a greater life overwhelms and swallows us from the world's point of view death has swallowed us but when we are in Christ life has swallowed us and we enter into greater life and and that's that's what the message is now what happens as a result now this whole bit by the way is filled the whole story is filled with irony and sort of sarcasm in fact

Monty Python would be the perfect people to act this out they would probably nail it perfectly in terms of getting how the different the soldiers and others are reacting to everything that happens and just see what happens next so the angels let them out verse 21 and when they heard this that's the apostles 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 the apostles 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 the doors we found no one inside now when the captain of the temple and the chief priest 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 are teaching the people and the captain with the officers went and brought them that's the apostles but not by force for they were afraid of being stoned by the people and when they had brought them they set them before the council and the high priest questioned them now you know as I said

[20 : 44] I'm not well here's the here's the impact of envy and anger in our lives when you are filled with envy and anger when I am filled with envy or anger I am not interested in the truth and I'm not interested in justice now I would deny it when I'm caught with envy and I would deny it when I'm caught up with anger but the fact of the matter is we can see it in others when they're filled with envy or when they're filled with anger that their interest in the truth vanishes as envy goes up anger goes up a concern for truth goes down it goes down and down and down you'd think that what the high priest is going to ask the guys is how did you get out now they said well an angel got us out

I mean these guys are in the religious business they should say like really an angel like gosh like maybe I should reconsider my anger or or maybe they could say wow I mean that's a bit of a justification that maybe God's on your side and I we should maybe not have arrested you maybe we should reconsider that whole resurrection thing could we go back I'd just like to ask you some questions like I'm just really stuck now with the fact that you got out in such a fashion and we haven't been able to find the body Peter and all and so did you really see Jesus like you really didn't steal the body did you really see Jesus alive did you really see him ascend into heaven like and what about that thing with Pentecost did that really happen we've heard rumors that like there was something that looked like fire and there's the wind and like did that really happen and and you know we we want to obviously we want to have people worship the God of Israel and you keep saying that the

God of Israel is the one doing all of these things and and you preach with a type of power that we just don't have and you have an attractiveness that we don't have like could you tell us a little bit more about that well no they could have done all of those things but they are filled with envy they are filled with anger they would be happier to have the apostles destroyed and people be less observant Jews than for them to thrive they'd be happy to see these Christians destroyed even if it means less people come to the temple than before because they're filled with envy and envy wants to tear the other down anger wants to tear the other down and envy and anger aren't concerned with the truth and you see this perfectly modeled in the story look at the question that he asks in verse 28 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 well there's no law that says you can't do these things the only law is I'm the boss I have the hold of power you guys are nobodies do what I say and you see here's the other thing about the power of this story what did they say again you're trying to make it look like we had this person killed well actually they did have this person killed like that's the truth you see once again this is not a story where we other people I bet every one of us would have a friend or a husband or a wife who would say to us that there had been times in our lives when we've been wrong or done something and we've denied it refused to acknowledge it was true it's a human problem some of us are maybe far more prone to it than others and we're definitely far more prone to others to do this when we're filled with envy or anger and we get completely and utterly blind to what we've in fact actually done and you see this is also going to be one of the things which helps to show the real beauty and the wonder of the gospel because you see if you being made right with God or if you trying to reach your ideal self or if you trying to reach these types of you know we want to have the applause and the acclaim and the well doing of people thinking certain things about us and if that's our goal then to have people point out the things in our lives which are wrong it's sort of an unbearable type of thing because we need to achieve and we need to maintain these things and it's only when the gospel helps us to understand that God knows every bad thing we've done and still he loves us and he loves us we're going to see this in a moment and that starts to begin as the gospel becomes more true and real to our heart a place for me to actually say actually it is me oh Lord who did that it's still going against our human nature our fallen human nature but there begins to be a place that we can stand and see ourselves as God has seen us and both see the grace that he's offered to us in

Christ which is so deep and so broad and extensive that everything has been forgiven every sin has been forgiven and then maybe to be able to say well actually I did kill I was responsible for killing Jesus I was and see one of the things which is so wonderful about the gospel look what happens here we see what's so wonderful about the many of the things that are so wonderful about the gospel how does Peter respond verse 29 he says but Peter and the apostles answered we must obey God rather than men the God of our fathers no other thing you guys who you're Jewish people like us Abraham Isaac Jacob the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob your God and my God he raised

[27 : 48] Jesus he raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree God exalted him verse 31 at his right hand as leader or prince and savior and here's this wonderful thing he's saying this to the men who literally were responsible for the killing of Jesus now one of the things every well instructed Christian has to understand is that it could have been my hands that nailed Jesus' hands to the cross it could have been me who put the crown of thorns on his brow that I am complicit that was me doing it but even these men who literally were responsible for his death Peter says God God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins he's saying it to the man who actually killed

Jesus you meant this for great harm but actually God vindicated Jesus and he rose Jesus and he brought Jesus made Jesus resurrected and all of this was done so you could have repentance forgiveness and the forgiveness of sins this is a very powerful thing and in fact as well as that here there's another thing look at verse 30 again the God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree now those of you who know the Bible a little bit well know that what happened is that the death that these people conspired with the Romans to do was a death that by the Tanakh what we call the Old Testament was a cursed death and this is profound good news

I don't know probably some of you even here today and if not right at this moment at times in your life and if not us right now or times in our life there are people we know who walk around feeling as if they're cursed their failure in marriage their failures maybe in singleness or in parenting or in their economic life maybe because of the color of your skin your educational level your caste life if you're in India things that you've done wrong ways that you've been shamed or embarrassed by others you feel like you're under a curse there's something cursed about you and it's a very powerful human experience and I don't wish it upon any of you and anybody I have I have lived under that feeling and this is profoundly profoundly good news for those of us who feel or have gone through a season or are going through a season of feeling cursed because the message of the cross is you know whether the curses are it's whether that's actually true or it's just something imaginary but the curse that was on you when Jesus dies on the cross he didn't do anything so it's he's taking your curse upon himself and as he takes your curse upon himself he's extending to you blessedness he's extending to you life undeserved blessedness undeserved life is offered to you so if you here or you there are watching this and you feel under a curse

I want to tell you that that curse if you put your hands in the hands of Jesus or if you have done that in the past and you just haven't realized it that curse is on him he took that curse because he loves you he loves you and he offers you blessedness undeserved blessedness and so here it says when God in verse 31 that God exalted him in his right hand his leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins this is a very very powerful image like how can he give repentance well all of us have had experiences similar to feeling cursed and this sometimes be part of the reason why we feel cursed is that when we have wronged somebody and this goes the other way too by the way but I'm going to use the example of us we have wronged somebody and the other person shuts us out shuts us out shuts us out forever forever there's no amount of amendment of life no amount of saying you're sorry no amount of reparations no amount of counseling will make that other person forgive you or make them interested in having anything to do with you again for the rest of their lives you've been completely and utterly shut out and if we love them we wish we could repent we wish we could repent

I mean we can repent but repent is actually going to work because the other person will say you know I'm open I'm open to that I'm offering that as an option to you and so what we see here is this phrase repentance and the forgiveness of sins because they go together there's no point to say yeah yeah I'll allow you to repent and then once you repent they say I'm joking I'm never going to forgive you you worm no there's this dual promise and it's so powerful and so beautiful it's so emotionally beautiful and powerful that's what I wish that people outside the faith would understand that as you begin to understand the gospel and text like this it's so beautiful it's so beautiful and so one of the ways that we can understand what the gospel is it's the gospel is the Jesus comes to George he comes to you and he says I'm going to offer you a coin of uncompare unfathomable unfathomable value and it means you'll be reconciled to me it means you have life it means you're forgiven it means you have the Holy

[34 : 53] Spirit I'm offering you this thing and when it says that you have to obey obey just means that God is making this offer to you I'm going to give you this coin of unbelievable value I just hope you take it I want you to take it you know and so so we do and when we get the coin we look at the coin and on one side of the coin it says repent and believe and trust into Jesus the Messiah that's what it says on one side of the coin repent and believe and trust into Jesus the Messiah and then we look at the other side of the coin and the other side of the coin says your sins are forgiven and life is given to you in Jesus the Messiah just one coin we take that coin in our hands of unfathomable value and that's what the coin says on both sides you see the teaching of envy and the teacher of anger to play with a modern slogan there's a modern slogan that you do you but the bible says you blind you you blind you through your envy and your anger and refusal to repent and one of the things which is so wonderful about the gospel you see you have here the picture of the opposite of envy and anger envy wants to pull down

Jesus comes down to lift you up envy wants you to what leads you to pull down others Jesus calls you to look up to him and by looking up to him to see goodness and beauty and excellence in others that anger makes you want to hurt and kill but Jesus takes that proper anger that God has towards the wrongdoing you've done and that we have towards wrongdoing it's done and he has that he has that anger fall on him so that we might know life and love and our anger begins to see that that allows us to look at why other people might be angry at ourselves and why we're even angry at ourselves and to understand that Jesus has dealt with all that's really properly anger causing by having all that sin fall on himself and we begin to have a place where we can so hear the scriptures in light of Jesus that rather than having you blind you we can see that the scriptures bring light they bring a mirror for me to see myself and I can start to see myself and I can only do that in the comfort that anything I see in myself which is so ugly and so terrible and so deserving of shame and anger that Jesus knew that about me when he died for me on the cross that there's nothing in my past and nothing in my future that Jesus didn't know about when he died on the cross for me and still he loved me and loves me and died for me and so it's not just that I have a story that changes how I can understand myself and begin to see myself but I have Jesus with me

I have the Holy Spirit with me to bring their light and their truth into my life and I can begin to look and acknowledge these things and begin to accept that I don't have to be ashamed and I'm not cursed that that fell on him my shame fell on him that I might have honor in life and that's the beauty and the power of the gospel that's the beauty and the power of the gospel there's a text in the book of Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 it's not going to be on your screen because I didn't think of it early enough to send it and it goes like this therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses that's partially by the witnesses we learn in the Bible let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God and in Christ our destiny is to be before the throne of God above without shame without cursedness without sin made righteous in him and nothing nothing can shake us from his hand when we put our trust in him invite you to stand please bow our heads in prayer father we thank you that your word is a mirror and a window we thank you father that it's not just that the Bible says there were always exactly like these people caught up with envy and anger and untruths that sometimes father as well we are able to speak the truth we are able to bear witness and we give you thanks and praise father that when we bear witness to Jesus it's not just us bearing witness but the Holy Spirit bearing witness as well that it's not just up to our ability to persuade or the power of our eloquence or the lack of it and we thank and praise you father for Jesus and what he did and for his mighty death upon the cross and mighty resurrection and his great love for us and we ask father that you would make these truths more and more real to us so that we might begin to see us as we really are that your word would be that mirror into our lives but not just a mirror that it would also be that window by which we might understand how just beautiful and loving you are and how beautiful and loving Christ is and how beautiful and powerful the gospel is and that we might father live out of that beauty that we might walk in the beauty of holiness after we have put our hands in the hands of Jesus our Savior and Lord and we ask this father in the name of Jesus your son and our Savior

Amen and we ask you