

AM Acts 5:12-42

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Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[0 : 00] Holy Bible from the Acts chapter 5. Book of Acts chapter 5 and the page number is 1100.

! So we're going to read from verse 12, Acts chapter 5 verse 12 to verse 42. And the last few times I've been here, we've been working our way through Acts.

Acts records what happened after the Lord Jesus Christ was taken up into heaven.

And from there he poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples and the disciples set to work preaching the good news about Jesus. And also it speaks of their life together as a community.

We'll take up the reading in Acts 5 verse 12 on page 1100. Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.

[1 : 18] And they were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the rest dared join them. But the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord.

Multitudes of both men and women. So that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats.

That as Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits.

And they were all healed. 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.

[2 : 19] 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 and 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, 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 who were put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.

And 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 them before the council.

[3 : 39] And the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly charged 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 saviour 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 honour by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.

[4 : 46] And he said to them, Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days, Thudas rose up, claiming to be somebody.

And the number of men, about 400, 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 was scattered. So in this 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.

[5 : 59] Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

May God bless to us that reading of his word. Let's join together again in. Back to the passage that we read. That's to Acts chapter 5, verses 12 to 42 on page 1100 of the church Bible.

If we follow Jesus Christ, then we are following one who was opposed, one who was persecuted, one who suffered and was crucified at the hands of people.

And the Lord Jesus warned his disciples that they would also experience opposition and persecution.

And that has been true throughout history down to the present day. In the book of Acts, if we go back a chapter to chapter 4, we read of Peter and John there being arrested and having to give answer before the Jewish ruling council.

[7 : 28] And now here in chapter 5, that sort of opposition is stepped up a few notches or a few gears. And it's a more open and hostile attack against the church.

So our theme today is, and the theme of this chapter, is really the church facing opposition. And I want to kind of draw out five things from this passage.

First of all, the background to opposition. Second, the failure of opposition, the failure of opposition to halt the word of God.

Third, the response to opposition, which is obeying God rather than humans. Fourth, what opposition brings to light to do with the origins of the gospel.

And fifthly, joy in opposition. So the first part of the passage in chapter 5, it speaks of many signs and wonders being done through the hands of the apostles.

[8 : 45] And although verse 12 is a bit clumsy in English, I think this version, the ESV, does translate it right because it's conveying that these were done through the hands of the apostles.

It's not the apostles doing these miracles themselves of their own power. It is the Lord Jesus doing them. Right at the beginning of Acts, Luke says that his former book, which is Luke's gospel, was about all that Jesus began to do and to teach before he was taken up to heaven.

And that implies that Acts is all about what Jesus continued to do after he was taken into heaven. And he does that by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, through the rest of the disciples, the church.

And so it is the Lord Jesus performing these miracles through the hands of the apostles. These apostles were appointed by Jesus Christ to be witnesses of his life and death and resurrection. And their testimony was confirmed through many signs and wonders. And that's what's going on here. They met together in Solomon's portico. That was a sort of covered area, sort of porchway in the temple compound in Jerusalem.

[10 : 06] And people, new believers, are added to the community all the time. Verse 14, more than ever, believers were added to the Lord. Multitudes of both men and women.

And then it speaks of the miracles of particularly sick people being carried out and being healed. And not only from Jerusalem, but the towns around Jerusalem.

Heard of the miracles taking place and brought their sick. And all were healed. Well, in verse 17 and 18, we read of the arrest and imprisonment of the apostles by the high priest and his party, the Sadducees.

That was a sort of grouping within first century Judaism. So the apostles are arrested and we're told the motivation for that was jealousy.

The Jewish leaders, the high priest and his party are jealous of the popularity of the apostles. How they are gaining such a big crowd. Gaining new disciples.

[11 : 21] And also of the miracles. And the high regard that they were held in. And so they arrest them and put them in jail.

So that's the first thing. The background to this opposition. The second is the failure of the opposition. And we see here it's failure to halt, to stop the word of God being spread. The book of Acts is all about the word of God being proclaimed, being spread, growing, increasing. And human opposition utterly fails to stop that. Verses 19 to 21 recount this amazing, miraculous release from prison. An angel of the Lord is sent and comes at night and opens the prison doors, leads out the apostles and tells them. In verse 20, go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. And this life is, of course, the life that comes through Jesus Christ. [12 : 35] God wants his message, his gospel, to be proclaimed. And humans aren't going to prevent that.

And so in verse 21, the apostles obey. They go back to the temple. And from daybreak, they begin, again, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. And down through history, that has been repeated again and again. This year, in fact, this month, is the 500th anniversary of William Tyndale completing his translation of the New Testament into English.

It was the first translation of any part of the Bible into modern English, what we call modern English, as opposed to old or middle English, which were sort of quite different languages.

It was also the first translation to be made of the New Testament from the original Greek. And Tyndale suffered greatly for his work of translation.

[13 : 44] He was exiled. He spent the last 12 years of his life in exile on the continent of Europe. He was from England, but he was exiled. And the last year and a half of his life, imprisoned.

And then he was executed. He was killed for his work of translating the Bible. Killed at the age of 42.

Now, Tyndale's New Testament was published. It was the early days of the printing press. Copies were printed. And they were smuggled into England and into Scotland.

And many were intercepted. And there were sort of public burnings of the New Testament in English. But, of course, many got through and had a transforming effect on the lives of many individuals, but also on the life of these nations.

An amazing, irreversible transformation of England, of Scotland, and of other English-speaking nations. God's word cannot be stopped.

[14 : 52] This is a much more modest thing, but just in my own experience. In my early 20s, I was part of a team in Nepal that went around selling gospels in remote villages in Nepal.

And gospels weren't banned. They were for sale openly in shops in the capital, in Kathmandu. But there were anti-conversion laws in Nepal. And what we were doing was interpreted as being breaking those laws. So we were arrested in a village and taken back to the district police headquarters with two sacks of gospels in Nepali language.

And we managed to kind of get away. That's another story. But we were told later from someone who was there to witness it that all these confiscated gospels, that all the police in this big police headquarters were taking copies for themselves.

And so, although these gospels have been intended for villages, many policemen were taking them for themselves and reading them.

[16 : 10] And again, it's just an illustration how God's word cannot be stopped. Just to use another illustration, some of you may remember about 15 years ago, an advertisement campaign.

It appeared on many buses in Glasgow, maybe here also. And I think it was sponsored by Richard Dawkins, the well-known atheist, and others with him. And the advert said, there's probably no God, so just enjoy your life.

Now, many Christians may have been dismayed to see that. But I know that in the years in between, since then, that campaign and also the kind of movement, the new atheist movement it was a part of, actually got people questioning and thinking, well, is this true?

And got them investigating. And many people have come to faith in Christ through that. And again, we see that opposition to God, to God's word, doesn't hinder the gospel.

God uses it to spread his word. And that is very much the case here in Acts chapter 5. So we're told in verses 21 and following that the next day, the council, the Sanhedrin, they meet, they send to the jail for the apostles.

[17 : 35] And of course, they find there's no one there. And then someone comes and says that they're back in the temple preaching again. So they bring them in. We're told that they bring them in not with force because they're afraid of the people.

But they bring them in to face questioning before the council. So the third thing we learn here is the response to opposition, which is obeying God rather than human beings.

So the high priest questions the apostles. They charge the apostles with disobedience. Back in chapter 4, they had told them not to preach or teach in this name, in the name of Jesus.

And they say, you've disobeyed that. And also they say, you're determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.

So this is in verse 28. You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

[18 : 46] Now, of course, that was true. It was the same Jewish ruling council who had condemned Jesus to death just perhaps months before. And also in Matthew chapter 27, which gives an account of the crucifixion of Jesus, we read there that all the people answered Pilate, the Roman governor, let his blood be upon us and upon our children.

But now these months later, they're trying to wriggle out of that responsibility and guilt for the death of Jesus. Well, Peter and the other apostles, their response is in verse 32.

Sorry, verse 29. Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men. Their preaching and teaching in Jesus' name was on the basis of their conviction that God had commanded them to do this.

And of course, that was reconfirmed by what the angel had said to them. Go back to the temple. Continue to proclaim this life. So they were absolutely convinced that their preaching, the gospel, the good news of Jesus, was not just their own human viewpoint or ideas or opinions, but a message from God that all must hear.

And today that is no less true. God wants the whole world. He wants everyone to hear this message about Jesus Christ. Now, Peter is not here denying human authority.

[20 : 34] Of course, there are many human authorities. Parents, for example, or at work or in the context of study, there are those with authority over us.

That's also true at maybe the national level or tribal level. There are also religious leaders. These, we're told elsewhere in the Bible, that these are authorities set in place by God himself.

But their authority is under God's own authority. It's a delegated authority. And they are to be obeyed, but only when their instructions go against what God tells us.

Of course, that's true in any realm. If you work for a company and your supervisor, say it's a factory, and your supervisor on the factory floor says that everybody must wear red uniforms.

But then the CEO of the company says, no, everybody must wear green uniforms. Of course, the CEO's word carries because he's a higher authority. And God is the supreme authority.

[21 : 46] There is no higher authority than God. So if a human authority tells us to go against what God has said, then what Peter says here applies. We must obey God rather than human beings.

Of course, one of the implications of what Peter says here is that they, the Jewish rulers as human authorities, are actually going against the authority of God.

They are disobeying God. But believers are often opposed and persecuted for obeying God. That persecution, that opposition may come from governments.

There are governments around the world where believers are opposed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Or it may be from parents.

In some families, parents oppose the faith and the obedience to God's word of their children. Or it may be in government departments or in businesses, corporations, where the pressure is to go along with corrupt practices, to cover up incompetence, and where God's people feel they cannot go along with that.

[23 : 00] And they have to break with that in obedience to God. And so they suffer opposition, maybe even loss of employment because of that. Now, of course, we need to be careful not to give unnecessary offence in the name of Christ.

Sometimes, in foolishness, we do that. We have to make sure that we are suffering not for our own opinions or our own folly, but we are suffering out of obedience to Christ.

But there are so many instances where the world will oppose us because we obey Christ, because we are going against the grain of society, of culture, of the world.

The New Testament, in a number of places, warns believers that they can expect opposition, not to be surprised when opposition comes.

And yet, we also find in verse 13 that the people held the apostles and the church in high esteem. [24 : 08] That is part of the paradox of this passage, that there's high esteem on the one hand and persecution on the other. And, of course, we should seek that, as Jesus said, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

We're not just to look for persecution or opposition. We're to seek that others see that our lives are different, that they are attractive, that they are beautiful for the gospel's sake, and so bring glory to God.

But, of course, often with that, opposition and persecution will come. Well, the rest of Peter's message follows lines that we have seen before.

They speak of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom you killed, he says, you Jewish leaders, you killed by hanging him on a tree. And God has exalted him to his right hand as leader and saviour. And that he has come to give repentance and forgiveness. And that we, we apostles, we are witnesses of these things.

[25 : 20] We have seen with our own eyes the risen Lord Jesus. And also the Holy Spirit also bears witness through the signs and wonders that are being performed that you can see. Well, the response in verse 33 is fury.

The council are furious. They were enraged and wanted to kill them. But that brings us to the fourth point, to what opposition brings to light.

And it's to do with the origins of the gospel. One member, one very respected member of the council, is this man Gamaliel, a highly revered teacher of the law.

And he orders that the apostles be put outside for a while. And then he gives some words, wise words, of caution. Now, Luke records this, I think, for two reasons.

One is that it seeks to rescue the apostles from this particular predicament. But also in Luke's narrative, it highlights the origins of the gospel and the fact that the gospel is from God.

[26 : 36] So Gamaliel gives a kind of a history lesson, a history overview. And he points to two people in the kind of recent past of the Jews. One is a man called Theudas, and another, Judas the Galilean.

So Judas the Galilean, that's different from Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples of Jesus. Judas was a very popular name in those days. It's another Judas. But both of these men, Theudas and Judas the Galilean, well, Theudas claimed to be someone.

Perhaps he claimed to be a Messiah figure. And Judas the Galilean was the leader of a revolt. Theudas gained about 400 followers.

And Judas also gained a number of followers. The number isn't given here. But in both of these cases, they were both killed. The leader was killed. And their followers were scattered.

Nothing came of those movements. And Gamaliel draws a comparison with Jesus. Jesus also claimed to be someone. He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God.

[27 : 41] And gained followers, the disciples, the apostles and others. Jesus too was killed. Let's see what happens, Gamaliel says.

And of course, in the immediate aftermath, there's a difference. What happened? What happened? The followers of Judas and Theudas scattered.

Of course, Jesus' followers initially scattered. But then they came together. And now they are preaching that he's alive. And they're willing to suffer opposition and persecution for that claim. And Gamaliel's counsel is, let's just wait and see. If it's of human origin, this movement will fail and come to nothing.

Like the movement of Theudas and Judas the Galilean. But Gamaliel says, if it's from God, if it's of divine origin, it will be impossible to destroy this movement.

[28 : 42] And if you try, you will find yourself fighting against God. And of course, if you fight against God, you will be the loser. Now that, already, that had given Gamaliel some cause for thought.

Jesus was killed. By this time, maybe a matter of months earlier. Possibly a year or so. And his followers had not been scattered.

I mean, they were initially, just very immediately. But they gathered. And they were together. And they were bold and full of conviction, preaching this faith. Worrying to ignore threats and to suffer

persecution.

And their numbers were growing. So Gamaliel, months after Jesus' death, is wise to advise caution. Now Luke is writing the book of Acts decades after these events.

Scholars debate when Luke was written. But probably somewhere between the 60s and, at the latest, the 90s of the first century. So between about 30 and 60 years after these events.

[29 : 56] And that has given much more time to see what would happen to this movement. And the contrast with the movements of Theudas and Judas the Galilean could not be greater.

The Jesus movement, the church, has spread all over the known world. The Mediterranean. The Greco-Roman world.

And beyond. The apostles. The apostles. Those who were witnesses. Who claimed they had encountered Jesus risen from the dead. Had suffered much for those claims.

If Luke is written sort of a bit later. From the 70s onwards. Then many of them have been martyred for their claims about Jesus.

Having seen the risen Jesus. And others would be in time. And that yet they were convinced of what they proclaimed. They bore witness. And they suffered opposition. And the church grew.

[30 : 57] And so, looking at Gamaliel's test. More and more, it suggests that this movement is not of human origin. But it is indeed of God.

From God. Today, the church is global. In almost every country in the world. Now, of course, there are other global faiths.

Global religious communities. But what is truly remarkable about the church. Is that it has grown to this extent. From these origins. From a man who was crucified.

In utter shame. And humiliation. From these origins. It has grown. And today, there are followers all over the world.

Thousands. Countless numbers of followers. All over the world. How from these origins. In the spring of 30 AD. Did it grow to this? Well.

[32 : 01] It is based on what Luke records. That Jesus rose from the dead. That he appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days.

That he was taken up into heaven. And poured out his spirit on these disciples. To give them power for witness. And they went around giving their eyewitness testimony to these events.

These things have happened. And so, to use Gamaliel's words. This movement is from God. But where does that leave us today?

The gospel. The Christian faith. Does not have its origins in some human movement. It is from God. It is a divine.

The inspired movement. And so the question for you today is. How will you respond to it? Will you oppose it? Will you seek to, in one way or another, fight God? Many in history, many today, try to do this.

[33 : 04] But if you fight God, you will be the loser. Or maybe you try to sit on the fence. But of course, the danger with sitting on the fence. Is that it is just another way of opposing God.

Of resisting the claims that Jesus Christ has on your life. Ultimately, you can't sit on the fence. Jesus said, whoever is not for me is against me.

Don't fight against God. Go with God. Join his movement. Become a follower of Jesus Christ. Believe in him. And join with his people in his church.

Well, lastly, fifthly, there's joy in opposition. Gamaliel's speech persuades them not to put the apostles to death.

But there is severe punishment. They probably against, it seems against Gamaliel's advice. They flog them with 39 lashes. Which was sometimes enough to kill people.

[34 : 07] And they were given orders not to speak again in the name of Jesus. And then they were let go. They were released. But of course, it has the opposite effect from what the Jewish leaders intended.

Far from discouraging and inhibiting and intimidating the apostles, they leave rejoicing. Because they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus.

And there's an irony. There's a paradox in this language about being worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Being worthy and dishonor, just their kind of opposites.

And yet, they counted it a privilege, an honor, to suffer contempt and disgrace for the name of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps ringing in their ears were the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

