"Rejoicing in Trials"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 November 2026

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0:00] Good morning. It's good to see you all here. Thank you for joining us again.! In our preaching series this fall, we've been studying the book of Acts, which is technically! called the Acts of the Apostles in most English versions. It's a good description as far as it goes, for in many ways, the book is about the actions of the Apostles, followers of Jesus, who are central in the launching and building of the church. Somehow, sometimes, however, when we look at the book, we may not approach it very well. Sometimes we want the book of Acts to serve for us like a user's guide. How did they do what they did, and how do we get the same outcome that they did? It's a very human impulse to do this. We see it in, say, professional sports coaching. We see it in business strategies. We've seen all sorts of things. How did they do it, and how do we bottle it, imitate it, replicate it, and reproduce it so that we can do the same thing that they did?

And it's so easy for us to do that with the book of Acts. Make it about strategies, techniques, and programs, and the key to growing the church. Now, we want to be careful in how we think about this because certainly there are principles, and there are things that we do have to learn from studying the book of Acts in terms of how the church grows. But this morning, I want to look a little bit differently from a slightly different angle. I want to see it not as a user's manual, but as a revelation of God's work. I want us to look at it and see not the Acts of the Apostles, but maybe we could rename the book, The Acts of God in Building His Church. So as we look at it this morning, we're going to look at a passage in Acts chapter 5. We're going to be looking at verses 12 through 42, and that's page 858 on your pew Bible if you want to follow along, or around there, because we have two different printings now in our church. What we want to do is look at God's work, and as you turn there, let me just remind you of the context of this. Jesus has died. He's risen.
The very beginning of Acts, He ascended into heaven and disappeared, and the apostles were left saying, okay, what now? In chapter 2, God poured out the Holy Spirit upon them and did great works among them, helping them to proclaim the resurrected Christ to the crowd there, and God began to build the church.
And in this section of Acts from chapter 3 to chapter 8, we see God continuing to build His church in Jerusalem in particular. Geographically, it's all about what's happening around Jerusalem and in that region. And so the passage that we're looking at today in chapter 5 is another episode in this story, and it's a bit long and has a lot of different elements. I'll be honest with you, I wrestled to think through how do I pull this together. But what we're going to do is we're going to read the whole thing, and then I'm going to make four observations about the dynamics around God's work in building the church. So let's go ahead and read God's Word together, and then I'll pray, and then we'll dive in. So Acts chapter 5, starting in verse 12.
Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles, 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.
[4:11] 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 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

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

those who were with him, they called together the council and all the senate 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 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 to the people. Then the captain and 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. 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 savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things. And so, 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. And he said to them, men of Israel, take care 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 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 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 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 Jesus as the Christ. This is God's Word. Let's pray together. Lord, thank you for this account. Thank you for this revelation of your work in building your church. Lord, help us this morning to understand it. Help us to see, Lord, what you are up to in the midst of this, and help us to be encouraged and strengthened in our faith in you. Lord, I pray for your help this morning. You would help me to speak as I ought. And Lord, that we together would sit under your Word this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.
[8:22] Amen. Amen. What does God have to teach us today about what God is up to? Four things. We're going to see four things in this story that we see as true and normative in the work of God as He builds His church. And the first one is this, that God's work provokes opposition. Now, you see this sprinkled throughout this whole story, right? In verse 13, it says, from the very start, as the apostles were gathering, there were others who did not join them. And it's a funny question. Like, who were these others?

It seemed like maybe they were believers because the people esteemed what was going on, so the crowds, but it seemed like there were believers who were a little afraid to step up and actually be counted as one of the apostles by publicly engaging in the ministry that they did, right? So, we see that hint in verse 13. Then verse 17, we see it come out in full force, right?
In response to what God is doing, the religious leadership of the day were filled with jealousy. They were jealous at the popularity. They were jealous of the crowds and the way they responded to God's work. They were jealous because many were added to the church, both men and women. They were jealous because it was spreading not only in Jerusalem, but to the countryside around, and people were bringing people to see the apostles from outside. And in their opposition, in their jealousy, it led them to cause these men to be arrested.
Not once, but twice. Second time was a little bit of a soft arrest, but they were arrested twice and brought before the council to give an answer for what they're doing. And they accused them in verse 28, you have disobeyed our order, you have created a public stir, and you have accused us, at least implicitly and maybe explicitly, you have accused us of killing God's anointed Savior.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[10:35] And of course, all these things were true, right? It's not like the apostles were innocent of these accusations. They were guilty of all of them, right? And so they responded by restating what they must do.

You see the opposition ratcheting up because in the response to this, do you see verse 33? They were enraged and they wanted to kill them. The opposition to God's work is often deep and visceral because it threatens our kingdoms as human beings.
It threatens our sovereignty. It threatens our independence. When God is at work, we start to realize that we are created, not creators. That we are not the Lord of the world, nor the Lord of our lives.
And it's very threatening to us. And even though they were restrained from killing the apostles, we see in verse 40, did you notice this?
Okay, we're not going to kill them, but we're still going to bring them in, beat them, and then send them out and tell them you can't do this again, right? The opposition was provoked by God's work.
[11:52] And one of the things we need to see is that this is true throughout the ages. It is always true that God's work in a fallen world provokes opposition. And I say that because sometimes I feel like we, in our 21st century tolerant, let's all get along kind of culture, feel like if we're just winsome enough, or if we're just kind enough, or if we just do enough social action that's good, if we can do, if we can be loving and caring enough to our neighbors that they will embrace the work of God and the gospel in the church, and there will be no conflict and no opposition and no persecution.

But remember what Jesus told His disciples in John 15, verses 18 through 20. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. This is just something that we should expect in the world. Now, we also have to remember the words that were read earlier from 1 Peter, right? Which says, don't be surprised when we face trials and suffering, but in verse 15, let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, or as a meddler. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.
There are times when we can take this truth that opposition is a constant thing provoked by God's work and think, well, then anytime I am opposed, it must be because God's at work. And the fact is that Christians can be opposed because we are stupid, because we are evil, because we are unkind, because we are ungodly, right? This is not persecution. This is God's refining judgment on us. When we are resisted because we do ungodly things, we should not think, oh, well, this is the work of God in the opposition. So we need to be careful about how we take this truth, but as we do it, we need to recognize we live in a world that will not simply embrace us. There will always be a crisis when Jesus shows up.
Some will embrace, and some will mock and despise. So we need to be prepared for it. We need to be not surprised by it, and we need to endure it with steadfastness, with humility, with grace, with strength that comes from God, and recognize that as we do face this opposition, it may very well be that it's because God is at work.
So that's the first thing that we see in this story, that God's work provokes opposition, and we should be ready for it. The second thing is this. God's work often comes through supernatural intervention. You just can't escape it in this story. God is doing things that are beyond what we imagine, right? Verses 12 through 16, the apostles did many signs and wonders, and believers were added because they're responding to the… seeing these things, and then responding to the teaching and believing in Jesus. It was a public display of God's power, an in-breaking of the kingdom, it was so amazing that… so surprising that they would even bring people on to lay them on the sides of the streets, and when the shadow of the apostle Peter fell on them, they were healed.
[15:54] This is unbelievable, right? But it's true. God was doing supernatural things at that time. And then there's more in this story. The apostles are arrested, they're put in jail, and then they're not in jail anymore. How did that happen? Well, an angel showed up and let them out.

Without the guards knowing, without anyone stopping them, without breaking the locks or physically changing anything, they were delivered, right? Now, look, when we hear these stories, it's very easy for us to be suspicious. This just feels like another marvel story. Like, okay, we found some new eternals who have different superpowers who can do something different, right? Or we think this is

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

just myth, right? This is just people who believed… they wanted to believe that God could do amazing things, and so they made up these stories. But do you notice that the way the story is constructed, the way that the chief priest showed up the next morning expecting them to be there, and they weren't there? And then there's this guy on the side saying, uh, they're over there.
You know, it's just…we need to recognize that the story itself is predicated on the fact that this actually happened. And then remember that if God was able to raise Jesus from the dead, He can do whatever He wants. He is not bound by the laws of nature. He can bring to life a dead person. He can do all of these other things. And finally, God works in a remarkable way through one of the opponents of God's people, right? He works through the unbelieving Jewish rabbi, right? The leadership is so incensed and so angry, they want to kill the apostles. And Gamaliel shows up, and look, there's no evidence that he believed in Jesus. It seems that we learn later in Acts that he was probably the teacher of Paul before he was Paul. So he was the Jewish teacher of Saul, the persecutor of the church, right? And yet, in this moment, he stands up and brings a kind of wisdom. And he says, look, guys, we've seen this before.
This is not a big thing. This guy rose up, a few people followed him, and then he was killed, and nothing happened. And the same thing happened here. And isn't that true? Like, this is probably what's going to happen here with Jesus. I think that's part of what he was saying. But in the delicious irony of the Bible, out of the words of this Jewish rabbi who didn't believe in Jesus, he said this, 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.
[18:57] Now, do you see why I categorize this as God's supernatural intervention? This is surprising.

This is remarkable that God would work through someone who doesn't believe in him to protect the apostles and to continue to allow them to do their ministry.
And the words that he spoke need to ring in our hearts. Have you ever thought about this? How do we know that God is at work supernaturally in the world? Because we have a church. We are 20 or 2,000 years later than this, and despite the opposition and the scandal and the theological controversy and the sin and all of the things that have opposed and threatened the church of God, it has grown and spread throughout the world, taking root in diverse cultures throughout the continents. God has intervened on a consistent basis to build his church. And so Gamaliel's words ring out throughout history.
If it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. So the church stands as evidence of God's ongoing supernatural intervention in the world.
And friends, this isn't just on a Magnus scale that we want to think about this, but on a day-to-day scale. Pamela and I had a great conversation on Friday. She had been praying for an opportunity to talk about Jesus with someone. And I don't want to tell the story. You can go back to the Welcome Center after and ask her all the details.
[20:42] But she had an opportunity this week where it wasn't her who brought it up. She'd been praying for it, but it was the woman she was talking to brought up God in the conversation and allowed them to have a conversation about Jesus. And friends, we might think, oh, that's nice. Or we could look at it with the eyes through the lens of what we see in Acts 5 and say, oh, do you see? There's the supernatural work of God, providing an opportunity in response to prayer that normally wouldn't have happened, but it did this time. Right?

Right? Paul says that we serve a God who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or even think. Friends, we want to believe that. We want to pray as if that's true. We want to act as if it's true.
So, God's work provokes opposition. God's work includes supernatural intervention. The third thing we see in this passage is that God's work fundamentally is through the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
Did you note how many times the teaching of the apostles was mentioned in this story? Right? So, you see it first in verse 20, right? The apostles are freed from jail, and the angel tells them to go back to the temple and do what?
You would imagine it might be keep healing, because that's what we see in 12 through 16. Keep healing. Keep doing these miraculous signs and wonders. But that's not the command. The command is speak the words of life. Teach them.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[22:31] And verse 25. I actually think verse 25 is really funny, right? Verse 25 is when the chief priests are like, Where are these people? Where did they go? And there's this guy, and he's just a someone in Scripture, but he's kind of like, So, the guys you're looking for, you thought were in prison, they're actually in the temple, continuing to do the thing that you told them not to do yesterday and arrested them for.

So, but what he focuses on when he describes when he says, not they're doing all these signs and wonders, but they are back in the temple teaching the people again.
In verse 28, the accusation that is brought against the apostles is not that they're doing signs and wonders. The accusation is that they are teaching, that they're speaking of Jesus, speaking of his crucifixion and his resurrection.
And in response to this, Peter and the apostles in verse 30 repeat again. And we see this in Acts. Acts is a continual. There are all these sermon points in the book of Acts where we see over and over again.
We get to see what the early church was teaching. And look, it's probably not all the sermons. These are probably summaries. But in God's providence, as these summaries have been preserved for us, they emphasize the things that God wants us to hear.
[23:57] And what did they want to say to the leaders and the chief priests again? We must obey God rather than man. Right? And after that, they keep going and they say this, the God of our fathers raised Jesus.

You say you serve the God of our fathers, but he raised Jesus from the dead. God did this. And he was killed because of your jealousy and fear.
He was cursed by you by killing him on a tree. But God has exalted him to be a leader and a savior. The king over all, the authority above all authorities, and the redeemer who will rescue his people.
He goes on and he says, and this is for repentance for Israel. This is an implicit challenge to them. You are the religious leaders of Israel. Here is your chance to repent. Repent of your unbelief of who Jesus is.
Repent of your rejection of him and what you did and your participation in his crucifixion. Repent of your rejection. Turn instead and receive and believe that he really is who God has called him, God has made him to be through his resurrection from the dead.
[25:17] So repentance for Israel and forgiveness of sins for all because he died to be our substitute. Dying in our place for our sin.

Taking God's judgment against our sin upon himself so that we could be forgiven and embraced as God's people. The words and the message that we see here is about Jesus, the way to God, the only way to God.
And then they finish by saying, and you see all this other stuff that's going on, the work of the Holy Spirit powerfully, supernaturally, crazy ways. All of this is meant to remind you that Jesus was raised from the dead and God did this for the salvation of his people.
So this is the message. And it enrages them so much they're going to kill them. And then do you see at the end, even after the apostles are released, what do we see?
We see them continuing. And in fact, it seems like their teaching is growing, right? Whereas before they were meeting in the temple in Solomon's portico and teaching in the public places.
[26:36] Now they're not only doing that, but they're also going door to door, speaking about Jesus and teaching them that Jesus is the Christ. The one that God has sent to save his people.

Friends, this is the heartbeat of what God's work is in building the church, the preaching of the gospel. It's going to be adorned by all sorts of obedience and good works and supernatural works of the Spirit and all sorts of wonderful things.
But this is the core of what God is doing in building the church. And friends, this is why we at Trinity talk about Trinity being a gospel-centered people.
We want this message to be the treasure of our hearts. The gospel isn't just the beginning of the Christian life. It's the centerpiece. The work of what Jesus has done and the person of who Jesus is, is continually the fuel and the focus and the goal of our lives as Christians.
So we want to make it the treasure of our hearts. We want to make it the words on our lips so that the things that we share about relate to him because we so know and love him that we can't help but speak of him.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[28:03] And we want to make him the center of our church. And so we gather as people from diverse backgrounds and diverse places. Why? Because Jesus is worthy of it.

Because Jesus is worth our life. So, the works of God provokes opposition. The works of God are supernatural intervening.
The works of God focus on and exalt and put in the middle of it the gospel of Jesus Christ and its preaching. And then the final thing we see is that God's work is about transforming his people, their conviction and their character, to be a part of his work.
And we see this over and over again. There are examples of what we see, God's work in them. In verse 13, we see they have boldness as they do this public ministry even in the face of opposition. Verse 21, when they're freed from jail, they're obedient and go back into public ministry. I was thinking about this. If you had just been arrested and thrown into public jail, and then you got out, what would you want to do?
[29:19] I'd want to go home, take a shower, have a snack, and lay low for a while. Right? That's what I'd want to do. I don't want to poke the authorities. I don't want to provoke more of this.

But in obedience, they said, yes, we will do this. We will continue in this. We see this in the conviction in the face of the accusations in verse 29.
We must obey God rather than man. The stakes are so high, and the repercussions would be so great for them. And yet, they saw God had worked in them a clarity that allowed them to say, we must obey God rather than man.
Now, I want to think about this for a minute as we're closing. Right? There is, because we always recognize that there are authorities in our lives that want to control us.
Right? Your boss, your parents, your government, the rules, whatever the rules are in whatever context you're in. And rightly so, because God has created a world that has some order and authority over us.
[30:26] So we don't want to say those things are bad. But there is always biblically a very clear line. When a human authority commands me to do what God forbids, or when a human authority forbids me to do what God commands, we must obey God rather than man.

It's a very simple question. It's a costly one. It's hard. And we need to do it with humility and wisdom. We need to make sure we don't just excuse our desire to disobey because we don't like what someone's telling us to do.
But we do need to recognize, and we need to embrace this, so that our disobedience is not marked by arrogance or self-righteousness, but by humility and by grace.
And yet there is a steadfast conviction. We must obey God rather than man. We must continue to do what God has called us to do. We will not deny the name of Jesus, even if you tell me that we can't talk about it.
We will not stop speaking of Him to others, even when it's called inappropriate. We will not stop gathering for worship, even when we're told that we should not.
[31:41] We will live according to God's commands, not those of the culture. And friends, the only way that this God works this conviction into us is by being captivated by the worthiness of Christ Himself.

Because when we see that Christ is alone our Savior, that only He brings us salvation, then we count all things as loss for the sake of knowing Him, because He's worth it.
We deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Him. We confess Him alone as Lord and Savior. Because we see that what Jesus has done is so transcendently important, more than any other consequence in our lives.
The consequences of knowing and trusting in our lives. The consequences of knowing and trusting in and following Jesus are so worthwhile that we find what we see at the end of this passage.
The disciples who say, according to Luke as he writes this, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name.
[33:02] They saw that being connected with Jesus and suffering for that was something worthwhile. It was not something shameful.

It was not something to avoid. It was not something to change your life so that you would prevent. But it actually was worthy because Jesus is worth it.
The suffering of the apostles and the early church and the suffering of Christians today as we face opposition that may take all sorts of forms, whether it be societal shame and shunning, whether it

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

be mocking of the intellectual elites, whether it be the rejection of those who would say, come and party with us, whether it be the rejection of others who would say, there can't be absolute truth. There's so much that, so much opposition that would tell us that we need to do it differently and we will experience suffering. And there are friends, there are brothers and sisters around the world who are literally being imprisoned and beaten and dying because they identify with the name of Christ. Why? Because they've counted Christ worthy of all of this. I'll close with this. One of my favorite missionary stories is Helen Rosevere.
[34:28] I've told it before. I'm going to say it again. She was a missionary in Africa during the Civil War in the 50s, the Simbo Rebellion. She was imprisoned, beaten, and raped, and she suffered immeasurably.

But this is her testimony. In the midst of the worst and the darkest time of her suffering, God spoke to her. One word became, and this is what she wrote, one word became unbelievably clear and that word was privilege.
She didn't take away pain or cruelty or humiliation. No, it was all there, but now it was altogether different. It was with him, for him, in him.
He was actually offering me the inestimable privilege of sharing in some little way in the edge of the fellowship of his suffering.
She knew fellowship with Jesus more deeply in the midst of her suffering persecution. And she rejoiced that God would give her the privilege to do this.
[35:41] This is the work of God as he builds his church, when the gospel is lifted up, and when Christ is seen as so transcendently worthy.

This is what God does. Bold, humble, steadfast, courageous, joyful disciples proclaiming him for the sake of Jesus.
Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this word. Thank you for the account of those who have gone before us and have counted following you worthy of all things, even embracing suffering in the face of opposition.
Lord, we are humbled, for we know that in this country we often don't face the physical dangers that many brothers and sisters do around the world.
But, Lord, in the midst of these things, Lord, we ask that you would help us to see your work. Lord, that we would want to be a part of it.
[36:52] Lord, and that you would continue to encourage our hearts by faith to follow you. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host