

# Propelled by Persecution

Acts 5:17-42

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## **Introduction**

Today as we continue our study in Acts we come to a subject that is very well suited to greatly encourage us.

- All of us face opposition for the gospel if we are living a consistent Christian life.
  - We experience it together as a congregation...
    - And we experience as individuals from our family and friends who do not know the Lord.
- Sometimes it can be very discouraging to us when we see so many people opposing what we believe.
  - It can start to wear on us after a while—
    - We see what we believe being ridiculed in the mainstream media.
    - We see false ministers of Christ who ought to be our comrades opposing us and mocking us for believing God's Word.
    - We see the courts of justice in our land increasingly looking at those who believe and practice the truth as enemies of peace.
  - All of this opposition can unnerve us.
    - We know that we have brothers and sisters who are suffering much worse things for the gospel than we are,
      - but when it seems to be coming closer to us, it can make us discouraged about the future of the gospel and it can put fear in us.

But in our text today—in Acts 5:17-42—

- we see how unstoppable the apostles were in face of persecution.
- In fact, not only were they unstoppable, but they were actually propelled by persecution!
  - This is what happens when we enter into persecutions (or any trials) as those who are united with Christ.
    - As in our call to worship today from Psalm 66, we go through fire and water, but the Lord brings us out to rich fulfillment.
  - Though it is hard to see how it could be so when we are facing the threat of it,
    - once we enter it with Christ,
    - we find that we are strengthened beyond what we could have ever imagined.
  - Perhaps at no other time do God's people need this encouragement more than in circumstances like our own—

- We have not yet had enough experience with persecution so as to actually be acquainted with the degree to which the Lord strengthens His people through it...
- We are in a place of temptation to be discouraged and to compromise...
  - But Acts 5:17-42, if we will pay careful attention to it, gives us a testimony of how God keeps His church so that we will not draw back.
  - It is a testimony for you to believe for your encouragement and preparation to face persecution with boldness and hope.

Today, I want to show you five ways that persecution, rather than hindering the disciples of Jesus, propelled them along.

TRANS> First, I want to show you the effect of the previous persecution...

- the one in chapter 3 and 4...
  - when the disciples were brought before the council and commanded not to preach or teach in Jesus' name after healing the lame man.

**I. This previous prohibitory command of the council did not stop the apostles at all, but it propelled them along... it seemed to help them.**

A. The High Priest refers to this prohibition as soon as he addresses the apostles in the court.

- He speaks to them for the first time in verse 27.
  - You can see what it says...
    - **Acts 5:27-28: And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?"**

1. This refers to what happened back in chapter 3 & 4 when Peter and John were arrested after healing the lame man.

- The counsel met and they commanded the apostles not to preach or heal any more in the name of Jesus.
- Even though Peter and John boldly responded at that time and boldly told the court that "we must obey God rather than man,"
  - you can be certain that the council was hoping that they would have second thoughts about attempting public preaching again!
  - They certainly expected that their command would at least dampen their zeal if nothing else.

2. Often such is the effect of such a command from a high authority.

- This court was the highest court among the Jews—it was their supreme court that met in Jerusalem.
  - It is very common under such intimidation that men are silenced.

- They may not be completely silenced, but they certainly do not go out as they did before.
  - This is not always wrong either...
    - We must not bring reproach down upon all of our brothers and sisters who meet underground because of persecution in places like China.
    - Even Jesus Himself sometimes withdrew to avoid persecution before the time.
      - Listen to John 7:1-8:
        - **John 7:1-8: After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come."**
      - We need to be very careful about judging those who withdraw in times of persecution as well as those who go on with public preaching.
        - The ones who are to be condemned are the ones who deny the faith in times of persecution...
          - or the ones cease to worship the Lord even in secret.
3. But the apostles went on preaching at the temple because they had been expressly commanded by God to preach the gospel there at this time.
- This was God's will for the effective propagation of the gospel at this time.
    - They were calling the Jews to repent before the destruction of Jerusalem which was soon to come.
- B. If you look at what happened, you can see that the Council's prohibition not only failed to silence them—it actually seemed to propel them along!
1. Do you remember what they did right after they were prohibited and threatened?—back at the end of Acts 4?
    - They went to the brothers and told them what happened and they prayed for boldness.
      - And you will remember that God answered their prayer.
        - The place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit so that they preached with greater boldness than ever before!

- They came forth stronger as a result of the persecution than they had ever been before!
    - If the Sanhedrin had left them alone, they would not have been as strong!
2. This is a wonderful principle to latch on to!
- God's grace comes to us when we are persecuted or tested in any way as Christians...
    - And you become stronger than you would have been without it.
    - As I have told you before, when you see a truck filled with trials making a delivery to your house,
      - you can be sure that truck filled with God's grace is close behind!
  - God gives more grace to us in trials so that we can meet the trials,
    - and that is why we come out stronger as a result.
    - That is why those who have suffered much come to rejoice in their trials— They know that grace and comfort comes with them!
      - Thus James says:
        - **James 1:2-4: My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**
      - And Paul says:
        - **2 Corinthians 12:10: Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**
      - Samuel Rutherford who suffered much affliction once said that he feared times of peace more than times of trouble.
3. And so in our text, the High Priest actually testifies to the strengthening of the Apostles and their witness following the Council's prohibition...
- At the end of verse 28, after charging them with violating the command of the court, he says,
    - **Acts 5:28: And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine!**
      - In other words, they have been very successful in spreading the Word!
  - a. He is very distressed because the Council's effort to stop these men has had the very opposite effect!
    - The whole city is filled with their teaching!
      - Back in verse 12-16, we saw how multitudes of men and women were being added to the church as the apostles continued to preach Jesus.

- It was for this very reason that the High Priest and His council came to arrest the Apostles again at this time.
  - People were coming from all around were being healed and were hearing the gospel...
    - And so in verse 17, it says,
      - **Acts 5:17-18: “Then [as a result of this] the High Priest rose up, and all who were with Him and they were filled with indignation [the word here can be translated “jealousy”] and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.”**
- These men had high positions, and they realise that as people turn to believe in Jesus and as many miracles are done in His name,
  - it is going to put them in a very bad light as the ones who crucified Him.
  - The people will accuse of the shedding innocent blood (as the high priest points out expressly in verse 28).
    - They were happy to say, “His blood be upon us and upon our children” when they crucified Him,
      - but they do not want to be thought to be guilty of shedding innocent blood.
    - They want to stop the spread of this message.
      - They don’t care whether it is true—it is detrimental to their position.

TRANS> So you see that they are in a fix because their former persecution have led to the spread of this teaching rather than to the suppression of it.

- b. So be encouraged when persecutions come!
- Don’t let them stop you!
    - Seek God’s grace and you will find that God will use the trials as an occasion to pour out more grace on you than ever before!
  - You will do more for His kingdom and have more peace than you have ever known!
    - Do you believe this?
      - When your parents or siblings are opposing you and accusing you about your faith?
      - When friends are mocking you and trying to shut you up about Jesus?
      - When they call you intolerant and unreasonable when the only thing you have done is to gently speak the truth?

- God will give you more grace than ever before.
  - It is hard to believe it, isn't it?
    - But it is true—we need to trust what we are taught here in this passage.
    - God uses the world's intimidations to make you stronger, not weaker.

TRANS> Now let's look at second way we are shown that the gospel is unstoppable...

## **II. Secondly, we see that the prison bars did not stop the apostles, but propelled them along.**

A. Here God works a miracle to release the apostles!

1. As we have seen, the authorities came to arrest not only Peter and John this time, but the apostles—presumably all of them...
  - Verse 17 tells us that they arrested them and put them in the common prison.
    - This was a different place than they put them before.
    - It was the public prison where thieves and murders were put before they were brought to trial.
      - The Council is wanting to make a public display as a warning to others that they dare not preach in Jesus' name.
2. But we have read the wonderful thing that the Lord did—as a public testimony of His own!
  - a. He sends His angel who delivers them from the prison that very night...
    - The angel does this in such away that nobody at the jail knows that the Apostles have been released.
      - When the authorities go to get them out in the morning for their trial, the doors are closed and locked and the guards are there,
        - assuming that the prisoners are inside.
    - What a surprise to find that the prisoners are not there!
      - It may have been a surprise that cost the guards their lives!

TRANS> And look at what the angel does to strengthen them...

- b. The angel commands them to go right back to the temple and start preaching again!
  - 1) They haven't been released so they can go into hiding.
    - They have been released so that they can go on with the work that God has given them to do.
    - It is an important work and it must go on.

- 2) The angel's words are worth noting...
- In verse 20, he says:
    - **Acts 5:20: "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."**
  - What an encouragement!
    - The Apostles' message is "all the words of this life!"
      - This reminds them of how important their preaching was!
    - It was through the gospel message preached multitudes of men and women were obtaining eternal life!
      - How good God is!
    - Multitudes of men and women had obtained complete forgiveness through the gospel,
      - and He had many more to save!
    - And He still does!
      - What a gracious loving God we serve!
      - What a precious thing the gospel is!
    - Oh my brothers and sisters,
      - We must continue to preach this gospel!
      - We must not water it down!
      - We must tell people about Jesus and invite them to church.
        - It is the very words of life that move sinners from eternal destruction to everlasting life!
      - But how does the word do this?
        - It does it by showing people their sin—that they have come short of what God requires...
        - And then showing them that Jesus died and rose again for our sins so that through faith in Him, we are saved.

- c. Look at how encouraged the apostles are to obey!
- They don't hang around until noon...
    - They go back and start preaching as soon as the gates of the temple are opened at dawn!
  - Their response is given in v. 21:
    - **Acts 5:21: And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught.**
    - What eagerness they had!
      - They got right back at it.
      - They were preaching the words of life!
      - The work must go on.

- B. This miracle is very full of encouragement for the church in every age!
- It is highly symbolic.
1. It shows us that the Lord will not allow the gospel to be imprisoned!
    - It tells us that God is in control and it tells us that He will break through every barrier that tries to stop the advance of His grace.
    - The world will keep on trying to imprison the gospel.
      - That has been the testimony of history...
        - First the Jews persecuted as we see here in Acts.
        - Then the Romans persecuted for three centuries.
        - Then Islam came on the scene
        - And then Roman Catholicism.
        - Then communism with all its revolutions
          - But the gospel just keeps on breaking forth again and again.
    - The point is not that God will never allow His messengers to be imprisoned or kept in prison.
      - The point is that He will never allow His Word to be silenced.
      - And it is true, no one can imprison any of us apart from God's allowing it.
  2. This release from prison is very much like Jonah's release from the fish.
    - He was swallowed up by the fish for three days, but then he was released to preach to Nineveh.
    - And this is like our Lord Jesus Christ who was put in the tomb and then came forth on the third day with the gospel of forgiveness and life to preach to the nations!
      - Let the world bury all the preachers if they want to...
        - The gospel will keep on breaking forth!
  3. You need not be discouraged when the forces of evil come to silence the gospel.
    - They will always fail.
      - Rather than silencing it, it will be furthered.
    - One of the Korean brothers from Moncton that met with our Presbytery told about how Pastor Thomas went to South Korea only 136 years ago...
      - And how he was martyred by the Korean authorities and how he prayed that "wherever my blood flows, the Gospel would flow with it."
        - Now a quarter of the population of South Korea are believers—more than 10 million people!
          - The gospel cannot be silenced.
    - Put preachers and Christians in the tomb or in the grave—



- The word will go forth with greater power than ever.
  - Tertullian, the church father from North Africa, told the Roman persecutors:
    - “Kill us, torture us, grind us to dust...the more you mow us down, the more we grow; the seed is the blood of Christians.”
    - How true this has been throughout history.
  - It is still true today...
    - In Feb 1979, Bishop Festo Kivengere on the second anniversary of the martyrdom of archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda said,
      - “without bleeding the church fails to bless.”
- Imprisonment has the very opposite effect than what persecutors want.
  - You see how dismayed they are to find the apostles in the temple preaching when they were supposed to be locked up in prison!
    - In v. 24, it says, **“They wondered what the outcome would be!”**
      - But it seems that they choose to say nothing about the whole affair lest they should draw attention to it.
  - It’s really quite humorous.
    - They were up against something that was much too big for them.
  - If only they could have seen how far the gospel they were trying to crush would go!
    - That someone in a strange tongue would be reading about these things 2000 years later in a place called Halifax, Nova Scotia!
    - The gospel is too powerful for any human court to stop it.

TRANS> What encouragement there is for us when we see God’s servants imprisoned!

- As Paul said, the gospel is not in chains!

Now let’s look at our third encouragement from our text...

### **III. Thirdly, see that the present interrogation of the council did not stop the apostles but propelled them all the more along.**

A. Jesus had told his disciples that they would be brought before kings and rulers for His name’s sake.

1. But He told them not to be discouraged because this would be an opportunity for them to preach before rulers and kings!
  - **Luke 21:13-15: "But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.**

- Instead of looking at court trials as detrimental to them and their ministry,
    - They were to look at them as opportunities to testify of Jesus!
    - And they are promised grace to enable them to do this.
2. You can see that they definitely took full advantage of the opportunity!
- a. In a moment, we will look at the content of what they said,
    - but first, consider how different it would have been if they had not seized the moment of opportunity—
    - What if they had been filled with fear and had been anxious to find some way to escape the wrath of the court?
      - This whole event would have been something we would have never read about.
        - Supposing even that they were successful and had been dismissed with a cowed submission to these tyrants.
        - They would have had no lashes on their back,
          - but they would have missed a far greater blessing and privilege to testify of their Lord and to experience His grace.
  - b. May the good Lord grant us grace that we may learn from this!
    - I think about the times in my life when He has granted me grace to stand strong against the enemies of the gospel...
      - When I was able to testify of him before professors at the university or before family that was opposing me in some way.
      - Or even in the courts of the church when truth was being challenged.
        - These have been precious times of union with Christ.
    - Yet, whenever fresh opposition comes, it is so easy to be afraid and to forget how God uses us and want to just avoid the whole affair.
      - We all need the encouragement of this passage.
      - We all need to make the most of our opportunities instead of cowering away and missing the blessing.
        - Don't be boring and mundane at such times!
        - Be courageous and filled with the Spirit of the living God!
- B. Look at the wonderful response of Peter and the other apostles to their inquisitors!
1. First, they boldly tell these rulers that they have forfeited the right to be honoured with obedience.
    - a. In verse 29, they say,
      - **Acts 5:29: We ought to obey God rather than men.**
      - These priests and elders had true authority from God.

- But now when they were commanding contrary to what He had commanded!
  - They had seats as officers in the courts that the Lord had established among His people.
    - They were to be honoured and obeyed because of their offices as those who represented the Lord and spoke in His name.
    - But they forfeited their authority by trying to undermine the authority of the very one in whose name they had authority!
  - A Captain has authority in the military from the king, but if he begins to command contrary to the king's orders, he forfeits the right to be obeyed.
    - So it is with parents or pastors or judges or priests or kings who command contrary to the command of God.
      - We are not only permitted to refuse obedience to them in such matters...
        - It is our duty to do so.
      - If your own mother asks you to steal or lie or to break the Sabbath, you are to disobey her.
        - We ought to obey God rather than man.
- b. The apostles testify against the chief priests as those who have set themselves against the one that God raised up.
- **Acts 5:30: The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.**
    - When they refer to Jesus as the one God raised up, it is not speaking about the resurrection here,
      - but about God raising Him up as a leader—as when Moses says that the Lord will raise up a prophet like him who is to be heard.
    - The idea is that He is raised up by God to represent Him, and these men did what their fathers did to the prophets...
      - They murdered Him, and they cursed Him by hanging Him on a tree.
      - The one that God had raised up, the despised and cursed.
        - But though they did everything they could to diminish His honour, they could not take away His honour.
    - Like Balak of old, they could not curse the one that God had determined to bless.
      - This is what they had attempted to do, and this is what they were still attempting to do.
      - But their purposes were contrary to God, so they were destroying their own honour.

2. And now Peter and the Apostles proclaim the glorious gospel before these men.
  - a. In verse 31, they explain how God made Him to be Lord and Christ after they crucified Him...
    - **Acts 5:31: Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.**
    - He is exalted to the highest place of honour—to God’s right hand...
      - but to what end? for what purpose?
        - that He might be a Prince and Saviour...
          - so that from that supreme position of honour He might govern the people and save them!
    - From this exalted position, He is able to give Israel what they need most!
      - As Prince, He leads us in conquest as we go forth against our enemies with truth and power—against the world and death.
      - As Saviour, He delivers us from our sin and our enemies;
        - in particular the power of sin by granting us repentance
        - and from the guilt of sin by granting us forgiveness.
    - Those are the wonderful things Peter mentions—repentance and forgiveness of sins.
  - b. Despite the threats and intimidation of the Council,
    - the Apostles are proclaiming God’s gracious purpose in Christ to them!
      - Their message is not a threat to the nation—it is rather the way of forgiveness and restoration and hope.
      - It is only a threat—and a very great threat—to those who oppose the One that God has raised up to bring about this blessing.
        - Can’t these priests and elders see how futile their effort to oppose Christ has been?
          - They crucified Him, but now He is doing miracles among them as one raised from the dead.
          - They tried to get rid of Him, but now He is gathering multitudes of men and women into His kingdom.
      - They are like Balak trying to curse Israel and instead causing more and more blessing to be pronounced...
      - They are like Pharaoh trying to deny and curse the God of Israel, but instead causing His name to be more and more glorified.
      - Here they are, trying oppose Christ by calling these men before them and instead His name is exalted and proclaimed as Prince and Saviour!
        - The more they try to curse Him, the more He ends up being blessed!

- c. The Apostles explain that they are His official witnesses...
  - They must continue to preach because God has sent them to proclaim Him.
  - This is made evident because God's Spirit is with them (as He was with all the prophets) working signs and wonders among them...
    - Just as Jesus worked signs and wonders to show that God sent Him,
      - so now the Apostles who proclaim Jesus work signs and wonders to show that God sent them.
  - And they declare that the Spirit is given to those who obey God.
    - The Holy Spirit is not given to the chief priests and the elders because they are opposing God...
      - The Spirit is given to Peter and the apostles and those who receive their message because they are obeying God.
    - Peter begins and ends this short gospel sermon with obedience...
      - God must be obeyed, not man!
      - And in the centre of His obedience is Jesus Christ the Prince and Saviour who came to give repentance and the forgiveness of sin.

TRANS> Do you see?

- The more the rulers of Israel curse Christ, the more He is exalted!
  - The very interrogation that was supposed to condemn the Apostles instead turns out to exonerate them as the obedient ones who are in step with God!
  - There is no need to be disturbed when God's servants are arrested and brought before rulers for interrogation!
    - By the grace of God, the persecuted ones are the ones who end up being vindicated and so does our dear Lord Jesus.
  - The interrogation, far from stopping the apostles, only advances their gospel.

TRANS> Now let's look at the fourth encouragement from our text.

**IV. Fourthly, be encouraged that the murderous passion of the counsel did not stop the apostles but propelled them along.**

A. The chief priest and council are furious!

- Acts 5:33 says:
  - **Acts 5:33: When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.**
- 1. When wicked men have no way to answer their opponents, they break out in a rage.

- The word “furious” is one that literally means “sawn asunder” or “cut in two.”
    - Their reaction was irrational and over the top...
      - much like Pharaoh’s was when Egypt was being destroyed before his eyes and he kept refusing to let Israel go.
  - It is a dreadful thing when men become hardened like this.
    - They lose their very wits.
      - All they can do is thirst for the apostles’ blood.
      - They can see no other way to stop them.
  - These men had tried to catch Christ in His words, but every time their hypocrisy was exposed all the more...
    - And now the same thing is happening to them all over again with Christ’s apostles.
      - The only solution is violence!
2. Do not be surprised to get this kind of reaction from those who reject Christ.
- Persons who are otherwise rational and intelligent and possessed with self control and dignity will fly into pieces when the truth closes in on them.
    - It has always been this way.
      - This is why the prophets were killed.
      - This is why Jesus was killed
      - This is why the apostles were killed.
      - And this is why the Romans killed the Christians for three centuries
      - And why Christians are being killed this very day even as I speak.
  - Men who oppose God become blind with rage when they cannot escape the truth.
    - Do not suppose yourself to be in the wrong when this happens.
    - Recognise the rather that you are in good company with the prophets, with the apostles, with the martyrs and with Christ Himself.
- B. But see further that their murderous desires are not fulfilled.
- They yearn to kill these pests, but it is not yet God’s time.
    - No blood of any saint will be shed until God’s appointed time.
    - There are many marvellous escapes.
1. Look at how the Lord stops them in His marvellous providence!
- He strikes terror within them all through a Pharisee named Gamaliel.
    - He is a greatly respected teacher—the grandson of Rabbi Hillel.
    - He alone seems to maintain sanity.

- He realises that greater harm will come to the cause of the council if they act at this time.
    - He is like Pharaoh’s advisers who say, “Don’t you see that all of Egypt will be destroyed if you keep on resisting this man?”
2. So Gamaliel persuades the court to restrain themselves.
- a. His argument is that this movement will die of its own accord if it is not of God.
    - He illustrates with two revolts in recent history that have come to nothing...
      - That of Judas the Galilean and that of Theudas.
        - Both of them came to naught.
  - b. As a Pharisee, Gamaliel believes in the sovereignty of God and supposes that God may have some purpose for this Christian movement for a time.
    - He is sane enough to see that the efforts of the council to oppose it are making matters worse instead of better...
      - They should leave it alone and let it run its own course.
    - In saying that it might be of God, Gamaliel is probably not suggesting that it might be true...
      - Just that it might be part of God’s sovereign purpose for this movement to remain for a time...
        - God might have some purpose for it.
    - From Gamaliel’s perspective,
      - his advice is like Jeremiah’s advice to Judah at the time of the exile.
        - Jeremiah told them not to resist the Babylonians because God was the one who has raised up the Babylonians.
        - Jeremiah did not mean that Babylon was obeying God, but that God was using wicked Babylon as an instrument to punish His people.
          - If Judah tried to oppose Babylon, they would be fighting against God.
  - c. The court listens to Gamaliel—
    - Their quick embrace of his counsel is likely on account of their underlying fears.
      - Even moments before when they had re-arrested the apostles, they were very careful for fear of the people—that they might be stoned.
    - The last thing they wanted was a tumult in the city that would provoke the Romans.

- But even more, they had reason to fear God.
    - They were fighting against Him and surely they knew it!
    - They were uneasy to go forward with their plan to kill the Apostles.
3. But the main point is that God is in all this.
- God is the one who kept them from murdering the apostles at this time.
    - He still had more work for these apostles to do.
      - Their hour had not yet come, so He delivered them.
  - Always remember that your life is not ultimately in the hands of men or in the hands of chance...
    - It is in the hands of God and no one can touch you until the appointed time.
    - This turning of the Council from their murderous intentions reminds us that God can frustrate the counsel of men any time He wants.
  - And so if the LORD keeps you alive, it is because He has further purpose for you in this world.
    - Go forth from those who wish you dead with renewed zeal as these apostles did, knowing that God is with you.
    - Don't go forth with greater fear because you were almost done in,
      - but go forth with greater confidence that God wants you to go on serving Him.
      - He freed you so you can serve Him all the more, not less.

TRANS> Now let's look at the fifth encouragement from our text...

**V. Fifthly, be encouraged that the beating did not hinder the apostles, but even this propelled them along.**

- A. Although the council agreed with Gamaliel that they ought not to kill the apostles, this did not stop them from giving them a beating!
- Verse 40 says:
    - **Acts 5:40: And they agreed with him [with Gamaliel], and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.**
1. This beating was very humane by ancient standards—but very severe by our standards.
- Many ancient societies practiced mutilation of the body and other inhumane punishments,



- But the Jews were restrained by the law so that the maximum punishment for non-capital offences was 39 lashes.
  - According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*,
    - A strap of calf skin was used for this purpose, and the strap was not embedded with bits of metal and bone as the cruel Roman scourge was.
    - Thirteen lashes were administered to the chest, and thirteen to each side of the upper back.
    - The offender stood in a bowed position and the one administering the flogging stood on a rock above him.
    - Scripture verses of admonishment and consolation were quoted as the flogging continued.
      - It was a very painful deterrent, but it did not ordinarily cause permanent damage like the Roman scourge which sometimes exposed organs and bones.
2. With this flogging, the commandment was given that they should no more speak in the name of Jesus.
- Surely, this would make the apostles think twice before they continued to disobey the court!
  - Not only was there the physical pain, but also the shame that was involved.
    - We don't fully understand how powerful shame is in the Jewish culture because our culture is hardened against shame.
    - It was a very strong deterrent in the Jewish culture of the first century.

B. But God's grace is powerfully at work in the Apostles!

1. Instead of going away cowed and full of shame, the disciples go away rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus!
- And they go on preaching and teaching both in the temple and from house to house all the more.
  - Look at verse 41-42:
    - **Acts 5:41-42: So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.**
2. Here again, the persecution of the council has the very opposite effect of what was intended!
- The Apostles realise that they were opposed for the same reason their master had been opposed when He was on earth.

- They realise that the Jews are opposing them and seeking to shame them for the same reason they opposed Christ.
- And this causes them to rejoice because it means that they are walking in their Master's footsteps!
  - He told them that they would suffer if they followed Him.
  - And they realise that there is no greater honour than to be identified with Christ in His sufferings!
- In those sufferings, they have had fellowship with Christ!
  - They have the comfort and the assurance that they are members of His eternal kingdom,
    - and that as they suffer with Him, they will also share glory with Him.
    - The reality and comfort and assurance of their hope comes flooding into their souls as never before!

C. Oh my brothers and sisters!

1. Most of us have very little personal experience of the deep, genuine joy that comes to those who suffer for the cause of Christ.
  - Some of you have experienced it more than others...
    - Some of you have been called to suffer trials for His name, and in those trials you have sought to honour Him,
      - and you have found the communion and assurance of joy.
  - But let's be honest,
    - It is hard for most of us to fully identify with the Apostles here.
    - We find it very hard to believe that we could come away from a flogging such as they experienced rejoicing and ready to go and do what we had just been flogged for doing all over again!
2. But let me admonish you to be true to Jesus Christ.
  - Do not be ashamed of the gospel.
    - Do not draw back in shame and fear of what man thinks—
    - And then you will have opportunity to experience God's grace in the way these Apostles did.
  - One reason we haven't experienced this grace is because we draw back in shame and fear before we have a chance to experience it.
    - The disciples could have missed all of this if only they had softened their answer to the Council.
      - But if you could ask them, they will tell you that they are very glad that they did not miss this experience.

- It filled them a joy and peace and fullness of communion with Christ such as they had never known before!
3. This section begins with persecution, and it ends with joy.
- Get on your computer or take a concordance some time and study the word **joy** and the word **rejoice** in the New Testament.
    - You will find that joy is almost always linked with suffering.
      - This is Biblical mathematics.
  - We think that joy comes when we are free of suffering,
    - but in Biblical math,
      - Suffering plus Jesus Christ equals Joy.

### **Conclusion:**

So you see that you need not fear for the gospel when persecution comes!

- The church's witness, far from being hindered by persecution, is propelled by it!
  - By prohibitions of councils—bring them on!
  - By imprisonment—the gospel cannot be locked up!
  - By interrogation—the more that we are asked, the more we can answer!
  - By murderous passion against us—the more the rage, the more the truth shines.
  - By beatings and punishment—they only fill us with more joy in our Saviour.

Our dear Saviour!

- He is at the centre of all this!
- He is the One God exalted to be our Prince and our Saviour to give us repentance and the forgiveness of sin.
  - He is the one we preach!
    - He is the one who fills us with grace and joy and with the Holy Spirit as we continue in His service.
  - May it be so!