



10 | ACTS 5:12-42

PRISON BREAK

If you are stuck, you need the power of the Holy Spirit to break you out.

Outline

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Call to Worship

Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! —Psalm 106:1

Songs

He is Worthy

Christ My Hope in Life and Death

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Jesus Strong and Kind

All I Have is Christ

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WELCOME: We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet from the Welcome Center if you are visiting with us.

GIVING: You can still give over Zelle through your bank with no fees.

Use secretary@livinghopechurch.net.

We also have a collection box on the Welcome Center

This is a promise from the Lord. “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. **Test me in this,**” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” – Malachi 3:10

Farewell Fellowship: for Pastor Garcia, May 16 after the service. We are asking you to bring a Spanish dish and a side or dessert.

Testimonies and Baptisms: We will be having testimonies and baptisms again in June. If you are a believer but have not yet been baptized, we as elders encourage you to be baptized. If you are looking for church membership, please let one of the pastors or elders know. We will be having a Membership class as well in the coming weeks.

Baby Dedications: April 18

PASTORAL CANDIDATE FOR SPANISH MINISTRY: Bro. Jose Salgado is our pastoral candidate for our Spanish ministry. Please pray for him as he goes through the candidate process. He will be preaching for a joint service on Sunday, June 6. He will be taking over the preaching duties from Pastor Garcia. We will also be having a Q and A with him as a congregation, date and time TBD.

Introduction

We continue our series in the book of Acts called “Life on Life Discipleship.” Our title this morning is: “Prison Break”.

Today’s message really is about the unstoppable joy of the Gospel. You can come against it; you can lock people up; you can (as is happening today) take away people’s church buildings. But you cannot take away the joy of Jesus in the heart of the believer. The joy of Christ is unstoppable in the heart of the believer.

Here in Acts 5, we find that the church’s growth comes as a result of intense persecution. Despite the persecution, the joy of Jesus cannot be abated. The apostles are sent to prison, and there is an unusual prison break. An angel escort delivers the apostles from the prison. Not sure exactly how it happened, but under threat of death, they went right back preaching. Then they are flogged with 39 lashes, and rejoice, and again, go right back lifting up the name of Jesus. This is unstoppable joy. Whatever prison you are in today, if you are paralyzed by the idols of your heart, living in anger or fear or despair, let me give you hope today. If you will put your trust in Christ, and get help from other believers, you can be a Holy Spirit filled, joy filled Christian.

Key thought: If you are stuck, you need the power of the Holy Spirit to break you out.

Jesus said that he will build his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. That means the church is on the offensive, going right up to the gates of hell and yanking people out of eternal destruction. The church will prevail. The government can take away our freedoms, take away our buildings, put pastors in jail, tell us we cannot gather, but we will never stop lifting high the name of Jesus. You see there is a more dangerous disease than any of the diseases afflicting people. That is the disease of sin. And there is a one hundred percent mortality rate. Ten out of ten people die because the soul that sins will die. The only anecdote to sin is Jesus Christ. That is why we must gather. That is why churches ought to be open. That is why we must constantly be preaching the Gospel. They can ban us from social media, but the Gospel will never be silenced. No one can defeat Jesus. He is the unconquerable King. He is our victorious Lion. Persecution will always come against the church. Remember what Paul said to Timothy.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. —2 Timothy 3:12

John Calvin speaks about this. He says:

We must realize that God is longing to shower blessings on his church, but that he still allows it to be harassed by the ungodly. So, we must always be ready for the battle. —John Calvin¹

And despite the raging battle, there is unstoppable, unquenchable joy in Christ! This is why the church grows in the midst of fierce persecution.

1. THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH (5:12-16)

Despite what happened with Ananias and Sapphira, the church described here completely triumphed over the attacks of Satan! The Lord dealt with the duplicity of this couple so that the church in Jerusalem could continue to multiply. The people were still growing in power (5:12), in honor (5:13), in number (5:14), and in awe (5:15-16). Multitudes were added to the Lord. These are the signs of a very healthy church.

We see in Acts 5, **while the church is growing at an incomprehensible rate, the devil is still on the prowl**. A church that is constantly growing in all the ways it should grow: spiritually, influentially, and numerically. But the growing church will also face the constant attack and harassment of the unseen realm. With fantastic growth comes the furious attack of Satan. Know it. Be ready for it. Maturing Christians always have to be ready to trust in the Lord, fight with the Word, and persevere. How do we persevere? First there should be a growth and manifestation of supernatural power.

GROWING IN POWER

Acts 5:12 | 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.

¹ John Calvin, *Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 76.

I want you to see how power is linked together with fellowship. They gathered together, and they saw the miraculous performed. Do not discount the power of our common fellowship in the Word and prayer together.

Seeing God move is what unites a congregation. It's never enough that a church is sound in doctrine. We must be sound in doctrine, but we could be the frozen chosen; we want to be the fiery chosen. We should preach with "**doctrine on fire**" (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones). God is never impressed with mere sound doctrine. Think of the Pharisees. Their doctrine was correct, but their hearts were far from God. We need to see God moving in our congregation in both usual and unusual ways.

What a place Solomon's portico must have been in those days! This was a massive, covered portion of the Court of the Gentiles, so all were welcome. What enormous crowds must have congregated there! Miracles were being done. This is the place where Jesus himself ministered (Jn 10:23). Many signs and wonders were regularly done by the apostles. Wow. I can't even imagine. More lame people were leaping. Those shut off in the darkness of mental illness were surely healed. That means not just limbs were healed, but families and communities were healed.

We should be seeing this kind of thing in our local churches. Though we cannot do all the miracles that the apostles did, we should be seeing constant lives being touched and changed by the Gospel. We should also see signs and wonders, which we will describe in more detail in just a moment (*cf* 5:15-16).

GROWING IN HONOR

Acts 5:13 | None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.

Now understand, with all the miracles there was also a new note of caution. Those who were simply curious or wanted the fringe benefits of Christianity, kept their distance. There was great power, and there were wonderful miracles. With the power of God displayed, **there was a reverence even from those who were not fully invested.** They didn't want to pay the price of persecution, so they dared not join the apostles and believers. But **all the people honored the early Christians.**

We see that a pure church is an honorable church. When we enact church discipline and take the Gospel, and our conduct, and our doctrine seriously, then the Lord blesses. The people will once again hold the church in great honor and high esteem. That means, we need to pray for God to open up the sewers, like with Ananias and Sapphira. We need to ask God to display any gross misconduct in our congregation. If you are living in sin here this morning, you are holding back the power of God, and the best thing for you to do is to confess it before God has to deal with you.

It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. —*Hebrews 10:31*

We must live as a pure church. We want to deal with sin in our congregation. It's not that honorable churches don't have sin. Then we would have to leave the earth. But we confess our sins one to another. And for those who will not repent, we exercise church discipline. Let's be open and honest about any coldness, worldliness, idolatry or spiritual adultery among us. Let us repent and be restored. Let us run to the arms of our Abba Father who waits for his

prodigals with eagerness and love with a ring, and a robe, and a banquet. Then we will be held in “high esteem”. People will want to know this incredible love of Jesus. So you can imagine, there was a constant rate of multiplication in the church. That’s what we want to see.

GROWING IN NUMBER

Acts 5:14 | And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

When an ungrieved Holy Spirit does his work unhindered and unhampered, souls will be saved. Don’t be afraid for the sewers to open. They have to open. Sin must be exposed. Forgiveness and love must be experienced. God is on the move. God would have his heaven full. He says:

Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. —*Luke 14:23*

Indeed we hear of God’s own command from the apostle Paul in Acts 17:30.

God ... commands all people everywhere to repent. —*Acts 17:30*

Everywhere at all times, the Spirit is moving, convicting, and drawing lost souls to a saving knowledge of Christ. Every day the Spirit adds new souls to the church. Sinners repent, and heaven rejoices! Let us cooperate with the Spirit of God and do his work in his way, and he will add souls to the church.

The church that doesn’t evangelize will fossilize. **A church that is ok with being dry will soon die.** Dear saints, we need the rivers of living water flowing through us. We need the Spirit’s streams to flow in the desert wilderness. There are lives that need to be touched and changed through you. The Holy Spirit is always at work. If he is not working powerfully in our midst, perhaps there is sin somewhere that is choking the channel.

One quick note: the text says that “multitudes of both men and women” were added. That’s important because in chapter 4:4 we saw that five thousand men were added. There were so many they stopped counting the women and possibly children. But now there is a clarification that it is actually both men and women being added. Praise God.

GROWING IN AWE

Now we see that the power that is being poured out by the Spirit is truly awe inspiring.

Acts 5:15-16 | 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. ¹⁶The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

People wanted just Peter’s shadow to be cast upon them, and here is the absolutely thrilling note: “they were all healed.” All of them! Not one exception. Now obviously there is a power among the apostles that was foundational for the church. If anyone on earth had this power today, all the hospitals would be empty. There would be no need for doctors.

And yet, we cannot discount God’s miracle working power in all times, generations and seasons. It will not be on this scale for very important reasons. **You don’t need to pour the**

foundation of a building more than once. Yet and still, structure and good engineering need to be depended on, so God's miraculous power still flows through his temple. In what ways? We have solid records of how God pours out his Spirit and what miracles have been done in the various awakenings of the church.

For instance, we are told that were only about 500 Iranian Christians from a Muslim background forty years ago, but over the past forty years, more Muslims have come to Christ than in the past 1,300 years. Now, through visions and dreams, the population of born-again believers in Iran is over 1 million. Thousands of believers are being added to the church across the Islamic curtain on monthly basis. We are hearing reports of miracles, healings, and more dreams and visions in the Muslim world. God would have his heaven full.

Now whenever there is unprecedented growth, there will be great persecution and grief. Get ready for it.

2. THE GRIEF OF THE CHURCH (5:17-21A)

A growing church is going to face grief and persecution. Listen to the important warning of Jesus.

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ 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. —*John 15:18-19*

Dear saint, if you live for God, you will be persecuted. If you are not persecuted at some time, you are not living for God. There will be great heartbreak for you, as there was for the early Christians. It was the high priest himself that Satan used to harass these dear believers at the Jerusalem church. Look at this high priest. The one who should protect God's people is persecuting them.

HEART BREAK

Acts 5:17-18 | But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

Apparently, the high priest was jealous of all the attention the miracles of the apostles was bringing. There was a neediness for attention by the high priest who was a Sadducee. **They didn't believe in the possibility of the supernatural. They lived for carnal recognition.** Sad.

If Christ lives in you, you will attract the hatred of the world. That means you may not be accepted by friends and family. You may lose a job one day because of your Christian faith. You certainly won't be popular in the political sphere of this world. You will suffer persecution. It's inevitable. The devil hates when the church multiplies. So, what do the Sadducees do? They think iron bars can keep God's work from going forward, just like some Roman soldiers thought a tomb could keep Jesus imprisoned. God's work is unstoppable.

What we read next is the most incredible prison break you could ever imagine. If what we see later in Philippi is any indication, there were likely songs in the night, with Peter perhaps singing bass! The Jerusalem city jail had never seen anything like this, nor had the

guards witnessed anything like what was about to happen.² The apostles go from heart break to prison break! An angel steps out of the darkness of the jail to set them free.

PRISON BREAK

Acts 5:19 | But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out...

The gates of hell will not prevail, and that sometimes means even physical bars of iron. Iron bars cannot hold back the Gospel. Persecution ought never take away our true joy. The apostles got a special visitation from an angel.

Can you just imagine? They were divinely delivered. Either God lulled the guards into sleep, or the apostles were made temporarily invisible. Whatever happened, it must have been great fun to be out on the streets while the prison lay locked behind them. **There is some divine humor here, too, because the Sadducees did not believe in angels.** And yet here, right in their own city, were some close encounters of the spiritual kind.

Why the angelic intervention? God was teaching the twelve apostles that he can deliver his servants from the world's oppression anytime he sees fit. He delivers in a similar way two other times in Acts—once with Peter (12:6–11) and once with Paul and Silas (16:26ff.), though in the latter case God did not want his apostles to escape but to stay in the jail despite the doors being opened—perhaps for an even greater witness.

Not only were the apostles divinely delivered—they were divinely commissioned.

Acts 5:20 | An angel ... said, ²⁰ "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

So that's what they did: they taught in the Temple. The guards were still under the belief that they were incarcerated, but they were in fact free and back at it in the Temple: preaching and speaking the Gospel to all the people. So they got no break. They went from jail break to breaking down the gates of hell again. Look what happened after they heard what the angel said.

NO BREAK!

Acts 5:21a | And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

In other words, Peter and John were granted a prison break, but they got *no break* from teaching in the Temple. Right at sunrise they walked back into the Temple, and they began teaching the hungry crowds.

Perseverance is the sign of real spiritual growth in the Christian life. Here were the apostles: one moment in prison, the next set free. Did they take a break? No. **There is no break in war time.** We are at war. We must get up and persevere in the Christian life. We must continue moving forward, teaching and making disciples no matter what comes against us.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 85.

3. THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH (5:21B-32)

The goal of the church is always to carry out Jesus' great commission, to preach the Gospel to all people everywhere, beginning at Jerusalem and going to the uttermost parts of the earth. No prison bars can keep the Holy Spirit from filling men and women everywhere from preaching the good news of Christ to every person on earth.

A SURPRISE: FREEDOM

So, God is doing a great work in Jerusalem, and bars of iron cannot stop the work of God. The high priest then is in for a big surprise. He has no idea of the prison break and how the angel (who he doesn't believe in because he's a Sadducee) has released Peter and John from prison. So there is a fantastic surprise.

Acts 5:21b-25 | Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."

Isn't it fantastic to see the power of God in all of this? These Sadducees with all their power and prisons cannot stop the Gospel from going forth. That's the boldness we need in every generation. Go do what God has called you to do, and do not worry about the powers the align against you. God, who raised Jesus from the dead and busted Peter and John out of prison is on your side.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. —*Romans*
8:37

What a great surprise for these unbelieving, lost religious leaders. They found a Gospel more powerful than soldiers and prison bars.

You ought to expect many surprises in the Christian life. Often the devil wants to make us negative in our outlook, but people of faith are hopeful. We should never live in doubting castle for any length of time. We don't have to live in despair. We have the power and hope of a God who loves to surprise us. God can open doors you thought were shut, even a prison door.

A SANCTION: OBEDIENCE

The apostles are now confronted with obedience. They are to obey the sanction of the Sanhedrin. The officers were forced to treat the apostles with respect because the sentiment of the people, who had been so changed and helped by the apostles was sympathetic toward the apostles. But Peter has to give a reason why they are setting aside the law of man in order to obey the law of God.

Acts 5:26-29 | The captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ 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.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

We are at a place in our country when the laws of man oppose the law of God. We will not recognize any law of man that opposes the law of God. There is one greater than Caesar, and his name is the Lord Jesus Christ. And when we read in the book of Daniel that there is a kingdom, a stone that dashes to pieces all other kingdoms (Dan 2:44-45), we know that that stone is the Kingdom of Jesus. All the great nations and governments that exist are metaphorically called “Babylon” in the book of Revelation, and there will be a day when we will say “Babylon has fallen” (Rev 18:2). But let it be known that we as Christians will never submit to the ungodly laws of men—not because we are against men who lie with men or women who lie with women. We are not against them, but against their behavior. We are not against abortionists or fornicators, but against their behavior. And it is love for them that compels us to confront the laws that protect that behavior. Let us not be afraid to confront ungodly laws but remember that all cowards shall have their part in the lake of fire (Rev 21:8). Let us never submit to the ungodly laws that promote the lifestyles of Sodom and Gomorrah. Peter and the apostles could no more obey the law to stop preaching about Jesus than any Spirit filled Christian could. Christians do not recognize laws that oppose the law of God. If we should support ungodly laws, we would be denying our faith, and repudiating the Lord who bought us, which we could never do. This was Peter’s point.

A SERMON: EVANGELISM

Now that Peter has clearly set the reason why they will disobey human law, he preaches the Gospel to his audience of the Jewish senate, the Sanhedrin. Listen to Peter’s proclamation of Christ.

Acts 5:30-32 | “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Wow! What a sermon. So simple. Again, we see the boldness of Peter explaining the Gospel clearly. “You killed him. You hanged him on a tree. God highly exalted him.” You can just hear Peter calling for repentance for Israel and forgiveness for their sins of rejecting Christ.

Now you don’t see the leaders of Israel repenting, but you do see them persecuting Peter and John. They hate the bright light of the Gospel. It’s like waking a person who is sleeping with the brightest flashlight in their face. The leaders and the Sanhedrin are angry. When the Gospel is preached correctly, there is always either rioting or rejoicing. No one can be truly neutral.

So we saw the *growth* of the church as they multiplied. We saw the *grief* of the church as they were persecuted. We saw the *goal* of the church which is to give glory to God by teaching the Gospel so God can move in people's lives. But now look at the *glory* of the church.

4. THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH (5:33-42)

Now Peter and John are about to get stoned by the Sadducees. But thankfully a very beloved Pharisee named Gamaliel stands up and calls for a private meeting of the Sanhedrin. He's going to call for everyone to leave the followers of Jesus alone. Let it play out. And the apostles end up glorying in the persecution and suffering they have to endure. They are so grateful to glory in the name of Jesus and suffer for him. What an honor!

THE GLORY OF GAMALIEL'S HUMILITY

Acts 5:33-34 | When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴ 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.

In the midst of the Pharisee's rage is Gamaliel's humility. When the church is the church, the wise will often defer. God's church will be noticed.

Gamaliel jumps to no conclusions. He's weighing the incredible evidence of Jesus. He's seen the miracles. He had certainly heard Peter and John had been released from prison by an angel. He invites Peter and John to have a private council meeting with the rest of the Sanhedrin. Of course, as the text says, **Gamaliel is beloved and honored by all in Jerusalem**. His best student at the time was **Saul of Tarsus** (Acts 22:3). But Gamaliel is not hostile toward John and Peter. It really seems he's curious and humble.

With the death penalty looming over Peter and John, the great Rabbi Gamaliel is showing kindness to the apostles. Gamaliel according to Jewish tradition was not only a legendary teacher and grandson of the great Rabbi Hillel, but he was also the co-chair of the Sanhedrin with the high priest. Look at the case Gamaliel makes.

The Pharisees were known as being lenient with sentencing, and so Gamaliel makes a case to get the death sentence reduced to a mere flogging.

He was Careful

Acts 5:35 | And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men."

Gamaliel's case was first, to be careful. He saw that God could be in this. The wise of this world are usually much more dismissive of the things of God, but Gamaliel saw the need to act carefully and slowly.

He had spoken with those who saw the resurrected Lord. And the miracles! Who could tell what the next miracle might be? Who could predict the reaction of the great crowds in Jerusalem? Persecuting the Christians could bring an even greater awakening. Gamaliel could see what was happening with his own eyes.

He was Thoughtful

Gamaliel goes on. He names a couple manmade movements that came to nothing. He says,

Acts 5:35-37 | For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.³⁷ 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.

Nothing is known for certain about the first of these insurrectionists, Theudas. We do know that when the detested Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. numerous would-be liberators surfaced in Palestine, and Theudas might have been one of them.

More is known about Judas of Galilee, who led a revolt against Rome that was crushed. The rallying call of Judas was that, because God was Israel's King, it was high treason to pay tribute to Caesar. Although the Romans crushed the revolt, the movement lived on through the Zealot political party. Gamaliel seems to have played down the whole thing in this speech.

The point is, manmade movements die. If this is a manmade movement, it will destroy itself. So, he says, be very careful before you try to destroy it. Move slowly and carefully, and you will be wise. Gamaliel now makes his main point. He says, be wise!

He was Wise

Acts 5:39 | 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; ³⁹ 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.

Perhaps the most important realization Gamaliel had was that **this could be coming directly from God**. You don't want to oppose God. Gamaliel was humble enough to consider the claims of the apostles, the power of the miracles, and the extraordinary things that had been happening in Jerusalem at the time. Remember all the miracles that had already happened.

At the time of the crucifixion, the thick veil of the Temple was torn in two (Mk 15:38; Lk 23:44-45). There was an earthquake (Mt 27:51). And probably most extraordinarily of all, some of the Old Testament saints were resurrected from their graves and were walking around Jerusalem (Mt 27:52-53). Perhaps Gamaliel might have even spoken to some of these resurrected saints. He was a Pharisee, so he would have taken the Bible seriously, believed in the supernatural, and believed the Bible's teaching, even though he was not a believer in Christ. So, Gamaliel rests his case and pleads for the council to "leave them alone" because they very well may be working for God and his Kingdom.

The more I consider the argument of this great Rabbi, the more it makes sense. **Gamaliel won because he was right**. Jesus was the leader who had been put to death, but now they were faced with an empty tomb and with followers who were performing signs and wonders, who were preaching with great power, so that the church was rapidly growing. **All the evidence pointed to the fact that God was on the move in this**, and they had

better be careful not to oppose God in their zeal to protect their interests. I am reminded of the words of our Lord,

You are not far from the kingdom of God. —*Mark 12:34*

After Gamaliel's case is made, the Bible says, the council of the Sanhedrin took Gamaliel's advice. Then the apostles were given a reduced punishment: flogging.

THE GLORY OF THE APOSTLES' COURAGE

Now Gamaliel had their charges reduced to flogging but consider the glory of the church of Jesus Christ that they are willing to die or be flogged. They count their lives as nothing, as long as the glory of Christ can be displayed.

Glorious Suffering

Acts 5:40a | And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them.

Evidently, because of Gamaliel's plea for leniency, a compromise was reached, and the apostles were let off easy—easy, that is, if we think thirty-nine stripes is easy. This was the Jewish punishment of 'forty lashes less one' which could be inflicted by the Sanhedrin or the officials of a synagogue for offences against the Jewish law (22:19; cf Deut 25:2-3, 2 Cor 11:24; Mk 13:9). Giving more than 40 lashes was considered degrading, and it could lead to death. So, it was no soft option. It was meant to be a serious lesson to offenders.³

But let's consider what Dr. Luke is getting at. **No beating can stop the Gospel.** No amount of threatenings can intimidate Holy Spirit filled people. Death and flogging is nothing when you consider that all Christians, through Christ, have sidestepped hell by the powerful blood of Jesus. **Death and suffering is nothing compared to the penalty for our sins being erased!**

Glorious Perseverance

Acts 5:40 | 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.

They were told "not to speak in the name of Jesus". It doesn't say they agreed to it. The apostles have already made it clear that they will obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). How glorious it is that nothing can stop the courage of those filled with the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel.

Of course, the Sanhedrin was serious; so much so that the charge not to preach the Gospel was emphasized by a terrible flogging. But this was something the apostles had already explained they could not obey. They had told the Sanhedrin that they had to listen to God over the Jewish rulers. They said, "we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (4:19-20). The courage of the apostles is glorious. All of us must be courageous. The Bible gives severe warnings to cowards.

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their

³ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 130.

portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. —*Revelation 21:8*

The glory of the church is that no beating, no iron bars, no laws against Jesus Christ can keep his people silent. **No human power or authority can harness or harass or halt the forward movement of the Holy Spirit.** The Gospel will prevail and go forth regardless of the opposition.

Glorious Joy

Now notice, when persecution comes, the apostles' joy is glorious!

Acts 5:41 | Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

One by one they were whipped until the flesh parted. And one by one they experienced **supernatural joy**. They were glad to be counted among the persecuted. Nothing could stop their joy: not a prison, not persecution, not panic. They were unafraid. They wanted to worship the Lord and live life on life discipleship literally more than they wanted to breath. Instead of being intimidated, they began to rejoice because they knew Christ. Peter would later encourage all of us.

Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. —*1 Peter 1:8*

It is a privilege to suffer for the name of Christ. Let us rejoice with glorious joy that when all is stripped away, all we have is Christ, and that's all we could ever need or hope for! Glorious joy in Christ!

The Glorious Gospel

Acts 5:42 | And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Not only did the punishment not discourage the Christians, but they had so much joy they could not stop proclaiming the glorious power and joy that is found in Jesus. Gospel means good news, and knowing Jesus personally is the best news ever. We are reconciled with the Father. We are filled with the Spirit. And it's all because of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The apostles proclaimed Christ *every day*, the text says. Whether they were threatened or left to teach peacefully, they lifted up Christ every day. And he was drawing all people to himself.

They proclaimed Christ *everywhere*. They kept teaching **publicly** (in the Temple) and **privately** (house to house). Apparently, there was nothing the Sanhedrin could do now. They had warned them and flogged them. But these Spirit-filled believers kept obeying God.

They proclaimed Christ at *every opportunity*. Wherever they were in private or in public, in whatever situation, it says:

Acts 5:42b | They did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Glory and hallelujah. They were doing life on life discipleship at every moment, in every situation, to every people group that they encountered.

Conclusion

What a prison break these apostles experienced. They were undeterred from teaching about Jesus no matter what the threats and sufferings they had to endure. They found so much joy in Jesus they were willing to lose their own lives.

You may not meet an angelic messenger to break you out of the prisons of life, but you do have the blessed Holy Spirit. He is with you, and if you feel stuck in your life, it can feel like a prison. Let the Spirit break you out of whatever cage you are stuck in.

Are you stuck in an unhappy marriage? Are you looking for greener grass? Water your own grass. Let the Spirit bring you joy that cannot be taken away. If you are joyless because of your circumstances, it's because you are an idol worshipper instead of a Christ worshipper. If your happiness can be threatened so easily by another human being or an amount of money or because of a health scare, then you're hoping in the wrong thing! Another thing that shows that we might be loving the world is a spirit of ingratitude. Look at the apostles when they suffered. They were grateful. Are you grateful for all things?

I want to ask you—do you need a prison break today? I can't promise a visitation by an angel. But if you are stuck in fear or loneliness or frustration with your life, Jesus will be with you. You can be set free. The apostles were fearless and unafraid. God is calling us to be a generation of men and women who are unafraid. Look at the apostles. They were threatened, imprisoned, beaten, but they kept returning to preach the Gospel. This is Christianity. Christ calls us to bear a cross in this life. We have to be bold and courageous. We will suffer, but we have to get up over and over and over again and persevere. Never give up. Never give in. Isn't the Lamb of God worthy of the reward for his suffering? He wants you—your life, your heart. Give it all to him now.