

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-23-23

Come back with me to the Book of Acts. We've been away for a couple of weeks. I knew that we would be travelling a little bit, so I booked Scott to preach last week; and then, as it turned out, we got to go do on-the-job training as grandparents this last Monday through Friday, so I had a little bit of extra time to get ready for this passage, and I'm looking forward to it. Listen fast. Be prepared to swallow hard: *31 verses* this morning! Now, it's not my personal best, all-time, but it's right up there. But this is all one event, and I want you to see it.

The band of believers in the infancy of the Church began with the "hundred and twenty" Jews who were meeting (Acts 1:15)—waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised (vs. 5).

And now, it has exploded from that "hundred and twenty" to *thousands* by the time we get to Acts Chapter 5 (cf. Acts 4:4). The power of God is on display *every day* through miraculous healings at the hands of the Apostles.

And the work of the Holy Spirit is otherwise evident in the astounding *unity* of the believers to one another (Ps. 16:3; 119:63), and their commitment to sacrificial care for each other (Acts 4:32-37).

And then God has demonstrated His holiness in the midst of this by—get a load of this—*executing two members of the church in front of the congregation*, when they sought glory for themselves through dishonesty (Acts 5:1-11). And that shocking case of Ananias and Sapphira was sobering, to say the least, as we looked at it last time.

Today, we return to the record of the early days of the Church, right at that point after the Ananias and Sapphira incident. The unbelieving leaders of the Sanhedrin—that governing body of the Jews (Lk. 22:66; Acts 5:21)—*again* will try to silence the Gospel. This time, there is going to be both a supernatural intervention—when an angel releases the Apostles from a locked prison—and then God using human means through the counsel of a man named Gamaliel. And God is going to allow His servants to be flogged, but they are going to rejoice that they were "considered worthy to suffer" for Christ (Acts 5:41).

So we have dispatched Scott Basolo to Africa; but as a little tip of the hat to him: five-point double alliteration this morning! Here's where we are going; the title is "Power, Persecution, Progress," but: Power is Poured Out, Priests Persecuted (again), Preaching Persisted, Pragmatism Prevailed, and Preaching Persisted (again). I didn't even have to stretch it to make those work.

Alright, the Power of God is going to continue to be Poured Out—demonstration after demonstration of His miraculous power. This was in the era when what Second Corinthians 12:12 calls "the signs of a true apostle" were evident in the form of "miracles...healings...tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28).

So, we come back to Chapter 5, Verse 12. The first half of that verse says: "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
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I want to point out to you that there is an interesting grammatical thing here. It would be more visible if we didn't have the verse divisions, and we just punctuated this, because a thought is begun there with what I just read to you, and then it is resumed in Verse 15; and everything from the middle of Verse 12 through the end of Verse 14 is a parenthesis. It goes something like this: "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people"—and then, Verse 15—"to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them."

Now, here's what is going on: As we saw last time, the only place in first-century Jerusalem where a large group of people could gather was in the Temple. The largest publically-available area in the Temple was known as "Solomon's Portico," so they met there every day. And here is that parenthesis, from the middle of Verse 12 through Verse 14—"and they were all with one accord in Solomon's Portico." And yes, I know the joke that that's how we know they had Hondas in those days—"all in one accord." "But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number."

This outpouring of miracles was part of an answer to their prayer back in Chapter 4, Verses 29 and 30, that God would continue to give confidence to His people—especially to the Apostles—and He would confirm their message with miracles (cf. Mk. 16:20a; Acts 14:3). But interestingly: between that prayer and this outpouring of more miracles, God did not answer that prayer until the church was made *pure*, and God *specifically* made an example of Ananias and Sapphira.

An important distinction we should make is that the early church was *not* about miracles. The Apostles *did not* put up banners advertising "healing services." It was a church built around, not miracles—it was a church built around the crucified and resurrected Christ and the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:3-4); and that church *contained* miracle-working Apostles, and that is an important distinction. The *focus* was Jesus and the Gospel (Acts 1:8). The miracles were the signs. A "sign" is something that points toward something else (e.g., Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:4); the "signs" pointed to the Savior after grabbing attention (Jn. 6:2; cf. Acts 8:6; Rom. 15:19), because the "signs" were "wonders" (Acts 2:22, 43)—they were awe-inspiring things which were clearly supernatural (cf. Jn. 3:2; 15:24).

So, down to Verses 15 and 16—"to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed."

Do you see already, Step 1 of Acts Chapter 1, Verse 8? After "the Holy Spirit has come upon you...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea"—and now, the people from the surrounding area around Jerusalem—"Judea"—are bringing people to Jerusalem.

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
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The combination of the impact of these phenomenally-changed lives, demonstrated by their sacrificial love and care for one another that we saw in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 4, plus the miracles that attracted people from all around Jerusalem: many were "healed"; and, as during the ministry of Jesus, some who were "afflicted" by demons were also delivered.

There was probably a dose of superstition involved; there certainly was wishful thinking involved. But the attraction to the Apostles—especially Peter—was powerful. And people came to believe that God's power could work, *even* through Peter's "shadow." Now, the text does *not* say that Peter's shadow actually healed anyone. But the point is, this is here to tell us: *that's* how profound the reputation was, that some people even believed that. The Power of God was Poured Out in those days.

So what happens? The Priests Persecuted (again). Again, that hierarchy of the Jews who did not believe tried to silence the message of the Gospel. You see, Satan *powerfully* hates Christ and the Gospel (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8), and those who believe in Christ and preach the Gospel (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:17); and he will use anyone who shares his hatred for Jesus, or who is clueless enough to go along with him. And again, Satan's willing dupes are the Sadducees—one of the main groups among the Jews. The Sadducees tended to control the priesthood.

On the surface, what you are about to see—it's almost comical, as the pompous, aristocratic, proud, arrogant Sadducees again decide: "Hey! Let's throw the Apostles in jail—that'll help!" And this time, God doesn't even wait for humans to decide to let them go. So, look at Verse 17—"But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is, the sect of the Sadducees)..." The Sadducees were the religious liberals; they did not believe in resurrection (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8), so can you imagine how irksome it was that now there were *thousands and thousands* of people preaching about the resurrected Jesus—the One that *they* had crucified!

The other main faction is the Pharisees. The Pharisees were the *super-strict* ones, the hyper-legalistic ones. Do you want to know how to remember it? The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection—that's why they are "sad, you see"—you'll never forget it again! Even if you *try* to, you won't be able to forget that again.

It says "they were filled with jealousy." "This is"—as we kept saying—"our temple! We are the ones in charge here! *You* are a bunch of infiltrators! We don't like this! We don't like the message! We don't like *you*! Go away! Shut up!" And they wouldn't—so "they were filled with jealousy" (cf. Matt. 27:18; Ac. 13:45; 17:5; 22:21-22; 1 Thess. 2:14-16). "They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.' Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach" (vss. 17-21).

I would love to hear how they started the teaching that morning: "A funny thing happened to us after the service yesterday; and on the way here this morning, another demonstration of the power of God."

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

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Date: 4-23-23

They started at "daybreak." The first thing in their business day, the Sanhedrin, that governing body of the Jews—dominated by Sadducees, but it included Pharisees, as you'll see—the Sanhedrin called themselves into session. They, too, could have said, "A funny thing happened this morning."

Look how it was for them, in the middle of Verse 21—"Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel"—remember, I explained when they had Peter and John there: they were seated in a circle, and whoever was being interrogated was in the middle, so you were *very clearly* on trial—"and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, saying, 'We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.' Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this" (vss. 21-24).

Now, the *only* reason "they were greatly perplexed" is that they had *ruled out* the correct answer to what was going on—and life is perplexing when you have already rejected the right answer! You know, an Evolutionist rejects, *a priori*, the fact that God created everything from nothing "in six days" (Ex. 20:11); and so he has *ruled out* the answer to the question, and then he says, "Where did it all come from? Well, we never see it happen, so it must take a long time—so it was billions and billions of years." And it's absurd! (cf. Rom. 1:22) You get "greatly perplexed" when you have *eliminated* the answer before you face the question! And they were so entrenched in their fossilized unbelief and their pride and their pomposity, it was perplexing.

Now, we know what they *should* have said. It *should have been* something like: "Uh, guys, remember that empty tomb? Well, those same guys that keep talking about Jesus and His resurrection—now, they've left behind an *empty jail*, too! And they're still preaching!"

So, look what happens: Verse 25—"But someone came and reported to them, 'The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!' Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned)" (vss. 25-26).

Now, if you are trying to prove that you are the big tough guy in town, if you are trying to prove your authority—and you can't keep twelve unarmed, peaceful men in jail any better than you can keep a dead body in a tomb, even with the help of soldiers—you have a problem! They are in a pickle here, so they had to proceed with an extremely uneasy caution. They were so "filled with jealousy," they were so frustrated, that they might have resorted to *anything*—even death—to silence the Apostles; but "the people" in general were insatiably curious about the miracles and the changed lives of all the people they were seeing, and the disciples were unwavering in their commitment. So, the Sadducees, who *we know* would resort even to murder—they worked for *a year* to try to get Jesus killed—they would do *anything* to defend their turf; so *they* were afraid they might be lynched if they got physical with the Apostles.

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
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Date: 4-23-23

Now, a couple of comments there.

1: Observe that angry, proud, unbelieving people, who will resort to violence, automatically *assume* that everybody else thinks like they do, and they would do the same things. *They* were so full of anger, *they* were so full of jealousy, *they* were so murderous—*they* assumed that if they did something, the other guys would murder them. That's how people think, and it's sad.

2: Observe also that the Apostles did not resist or protest. That could have become an ugly scene, if they did. They *could* have stirred up the crowd—but they didn't. They *could* have demanded their rights—but they didn't. They *could* have called for their friends to rally and picket the Sanhedrin chambers—but they didn't. They remained peaceful, calm, rational (2 Tim. 2:24-25), and zealously committed to preaching "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23), "risen" (Matt. 28:7), "ascended" (Eph. 4:8), and "coming" again (2 Thess. 2:8; Jas. 5:8; Rev. 1:7).

So, look at Verse 27—"When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council"—right in the middle of the circle. "The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' " (vs. 28).

What a "question"! *There's no question there!* That's just, "Harrumph! We are in charge! We don't like you! Be quiet, and go away!" That's what they wanted to say.

And what infuriated them so much—do you realize that they actually accidentally gave a supreme compliment to the Apostles? "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." "Hey—*good on us!* Praise God! The Holy Spirit is at work!" Now, I'm sure there is some hyperbole in there, but hyperbole doesn't make sense unless there's some truth behind it (cf. Lk. 24:18; Acts 1:19; 26:26); and it's true that wherever anybody might go in Jerusalem in those days, they would encounter Christians; and they would be out in the open in the most visible area in the Temple—where they met, day in and day out.

And it is also interesting to notice that *even the Sadducees* were paying attention to the public preaching. They *knew* that Peter was *right* when he said they had put Him to death. They knew he was right because—well, *they did!* So their fulminations were nothing but a tacit recognition that they were *actually understanding the message!*

And that makes it all the worse because they were *rejecting* with full understanding (cf. Lk. 12:47-48; Jn. 15:22). "Yes," Peter was saying, "His blood is on your hands! *You* put to death the Son of God!"

So, the Power Poured, the Priests Persecuted—and the Preaching Persisted. There is no surprise here. The Apostles were undaunted. Their defense—their answer to the question that wasn't really a question—was exactly the same as what they had said earlier, and it was *why* they had returned to preaching, even that very morning. Look at Verses 29-32—"But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.'"

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

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Date: 4-23-23

Do you think I'm trying to pin His blood on you? Yeah—*because you're guilty!* You did that! "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.' "

God's Power Poured Out. The Priests Persecuted. The Preaching Persisted. But now, a really interesting twist: Pragmatism Prevailed.

Now, the right thing for the Sadducees to do was to say, "You know, Peter, you're right. We were wrong to reject Jesus and send Him to the cross. What must we do to be saved?" But that didn't happen.

Instead, look at Verse 33—"But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them."

Now, remember back in Chapter 2, when Peter preached after the Holy Spirit came, and it says that all of those who listened "were pierced to the heart" (vs. 37); and they said, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And with their hearts "pierced" by the convicting work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 16:14), "three thousand" of them repented and believed on that day (vs. 41).

Well, "cut to the quick" is very similar to "pierced to the heart"; but "cut to the quick" here means that this got to them—and they wanted to commit murder. We are going to see the same word—"cut to the quick"—when we get to Chapter 7. And you'll see a *fantastic* sermon from a man named Stephen—who we will meet, Lord willing, next Lord's Day. And there, "cut to the quick" describes their feelings immediately before they murdered Stephen (vs. 54).

So, both "cut to the quick" and "pierced to the heart" describe internal spiritual responses to the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—but one is the conviction of sin that leads to faith and justification before God; the other is "the anger of man" that, as James says, never "achieves the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:20); instead, it bursts out in anger and murder and justification of *self*.

Now, here comes a *really interesting* passage. An influential voice is going to take control of these proceedings: Chapter 5, Verse 34—"But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time."

Now, who is this "Gamaliel" guy? Well, he has some clout! He stands up and says, "Okay, take the prisoners out; we have to talk here"—*and they do it!* He was a highly influential man. What do we now about him? Well, we know that he was the grandson of a famous rabbi named Hillel. We know that Gamaliel had become the leader of one of the strongest factions of the Pharisees—the other party [in first-century Judaism], that always warred with the Sadducees. We know that to be a part of the Sanhedrin, you *had* to be regarded as someone with much influence—and he *did* have much influence; you can tell, how he took over this meeting. He was persuasive; he was eloquent.

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

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Date: 4-23-23

Something else we know about Gamaliel, and this is interesting: In Acts Chapter 22, when the Apostle Paul is giving his testimony, part of his resume is that *he* was a student of Gamaliel (vs. 3; cf. 26:5). These things are going to start connecting here more and more as we move along.

What Gamaliel says is a case of persuasive human wisdom that carries the day—and ends up *completely missing* the most important point. Verses 35-37—"And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men.' " Now, he is going to give two illustrations: "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered."

So Gamaliel is saying, "Guys, hold off. *Caution* in how we handle the Apostles!" And he makes his point with these two incidents from their recent history. "Theudas" was a man who had led some kind of revolt. There are a couple of different "Theudas"—or, "Theudi," whatever the plural is. The other one gets mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus; we don't know anything about this "Theudas," except what is said here. It was almost certainly that he stirred up a rebellion against Rome, because that was always the bane of the Jews: being under the thumb of Rome. All we know about this guy is what Gamaliel says: He rallied "four hundred men," stirred them up, then he was assassinated, and his movement died with him.

"Judas of Galilee"—we know a little more about him: He was the founder of the "Zealots" party. The Zealots were the ones—there were the Pharisees, the Sadducees; there was also the Zealots—they were the ones who were the political activists, whose *purpose in life* was to stir up people to rebel against Rome. He make his splash—notice, it says "in the days of the census"; that's referring to the same "census" during the time "while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Lk. 2:2), that census that brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus (vss. 4-6). In the case of "Judas of Galilee," it was more than a flash in the pan because, at least after him, the Zealot party got a little bit of traction, and continued. But "Judas of Galilee" also was assassinated, and the desired insurrection never happened.

So, here comes Gamaliel's advice: Verses 38 and 39—"So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

Now, here's an interesting situation! You might say, "Wow! That Gamaliel guy has a *great* understanding of the sovereignty of God!" That's a valid observation. But merely understanding the *sovereignty* of God is not enough; you have to *also* grasp the *message* that God gives us in His Word. If Gamaliel *truly* was a man of God, he would have led the charge to call the entire Sanhedrin to repent and follow Jesus! He probably would have said, "Get Peter back in here. You all need to hear his sermon again!"

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-23-23

He was not that man; he did not heed the truth. He might have had some human wisdom about him—he obviously didn't want a war on his hands—but he rejected the Gospel.

However, his advice prevailed that day in the Sanhedrin. Look at Verse 40—"They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them."

Well, "they took his advice" as far as not putting the Apostles back in jail; but he said, "Just walk away from these guys; leave them alone." But, oh, the Sanhedrin, being the loving and compassionate people they were, "flogged them and ordered them" again "not to speak in the name of Jesus." And they should have known by then: that doesn't do any good; it only emboldens the Christians (Prov. 28:1b; 29:25). But "they flogged them" and they "released them."

Now, here's an interesting question. You probably, like me, have this list, at least a mental list of things you would like to ask when you get to Heaven. I want to know: "Is Gamaliel here?" What if he saw the transformation in his star pupil, Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, and he heard his message, and he came to faith in Christ? What if he followed his own counsel and said, "I don't want to be 'fighting against God!'"? Well, believe it or not, a lot of people have speculated about that; and what we know is: A lot of people have speculated about that. We don't know—but, oh, Gamaliel is one of the ones I would love to meet. I hope that that soldier who said, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54)—I hope that was a genuine declaration of faith; I'd love to meet him. I want to meet the thief on the cross! I would like to meet a lot of those special characters that were *as wretched as I am*—and God saved them! Oh, I hope he's there!

You see, preaching about the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus, calling people to repent and believe in Him—that began *exactly* as prophesied, *immediately* after the Holy Spirit arrived in Chapter 2. There was an *astounding* response—3,000 people believing on that day.

And the response was also strong from the unbelieving Jewish leaders who *immediately* began persecuting the Apostles. They threw Peter and John in jail, let them out, and they went right back to preaching, saying they "must obey God rather than men."

So Satan's next attack was from within: he found two manipulatable people within the church—Ananias and Sapphira; he orchestrated their shenanigans. But the preaching persisted and the power of God continued to flow, even after that *crushing* situation of Ananias and Sapphira.

And again came the persecution—this time, *all* the Apostles jailed. And in His providence, God used the wishy-washy human pragmatism of Gamaliel to get them released again—this time having also endured the torture of "flogging." I like you too much to give you a detailed description of flogging—it's *horrible*.

And guess what happened? You've seen the Power Poured Out, the Priests Persecuted, the Preaching Persisted, Pragmatism Prevailed—and then: Preaching Persisted (again).

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

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Verses 41 and 42—"So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Let's close with a few observations:

First of all, notice: The godly reaction to being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel is "rejoicing" to be "considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." Remember, the Apostles had been with Jesus all along; and even when Judas defected and they replaced him, it had to be somebody that went with them from the beginning, and they replaced him with "Matthias" (1:26). So they had all been there. They remembered the *momentous* day when Jesus spent all "night in prayer" (Lk. 6:12), began the day by announcing the Twelve Apostles (vss. 13-16), and then He preached the Sermon on the Mount (Lk. 6:17-49; Matt. 5:1-7:29).

They *knew* these words from the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5:10-12—Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are *you* when people insult *you* and persecute *you*, and falsely say all kinds of evil against *you* because of *Me*. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (cf. Phil. 1:29) These guys were just *living* what their Savior had told them!

Now, that doesn't mean you should try to go out and get yourself persecuted, but it is a marvelous promise that God will care for you and strengthen you to continue to obey Him, even when the immediate result is painful (e.g., Acts 7:54-60; 2 Tim. 4:17-18; Heb. 11:32-38; Rev. 2:10, 13; 12:11). They rejoiced because Jesus said to, and so they did.

Here's another observation: We must not let opposition of *any* kind—even overt, vicious, physical, life-threatening persecution—we *cannot* let that turn us into angry people (cf. Ps. 37:1, 7-8; Prov. 24:19a), or make us seek revenge.

As we keep studying the Book of Acts, all through it—and all through the rest of the New Testament, for that matter—you will *never* see believers in Jesus Christ seeking revenge against their enemies. Rather, you see them seeking the salvation of whomever they can proclaim the Gospel to—like, maybe witnessing to your jailer in Philippi (16:27-34)—something like that.

You see, the natural human reaction to being attacked is to *fight back*. The natural reaction to being hurt is to want to hurt the one who hurt you. But God calls His people, not to the natural reaction, but to the *supernatural* reaction. It's written down for us in Romans 12:19-21—"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God..." Look, *you might get revenge*, and trust me: *it will not hold a candle* to "the wrath of God"! (cf. Ps. 73:18-20; Matt. 25:41) Let *God* take care of that. He continued: "for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-23-23

You can hear a lot of fanciful things about what that means—"heaping burning coals on his head." That's a metaphor. I promise you, it would not be fun. You know, with my hairstyle, I got my head *sunburned* one day...*I understand that verse!* And that was only a *sunburn*; there were not "burning coals"! And now, I am the Apostle of the Wide-Brimmed Hat!

The *point* is: "Overcome evil with good." Do you think they didn't invite the people who were unbelievers to come to their "love feasts"? (Jude 12) "Hey, come, share with us. We're having dinner over at Joseph's house on Tuesday night. Come on by; bring your family! Let us tell you what's going on. We would love to share this with you." *That* is what they did. They did not let it make them angry.

And one more application: When there is a true work of God going on, it *endures*. And it gets people personally involved with one another. Did you notice the descriptions of what they were doing: "Every day," *relentlessly*, they were meeting "in the temple"—that means they met as often as possible, as a group, in public, open to *anyone* who cared to come and hear and see what was going on; *and* not only "every day, in the temple" but "from house to house"—that means they were very involved with one another on a personal basis.

Listen: We can apply these things in principle. This is why we *shamelessly*, boldly say: "The three hours that we meet on Sunday morning should be the highest priority for *any* believer in the Lord Jesus Christ!" (Heb. 10:24-25; cf. Prov. 18:1) This is *our* version of meeting publicly "in the temple." Now, we're fresh out of temples; it's a whole different dispensation—but God gave us *this place*; we still have some empty seats—*get to work!* There are *more* that need Christ in this city; we haven't reached them all yet! This is why we facilitate home groups. This is why we have midweek Bible studies. This is why we have youth gatherings. This is why we do Children's Church. This is why we do Vacation Bible School. This is why we do a Food Pantry. This is why we visit people when they are sick. It's why we distribute prayer guides. It's why we do Biblical Counseling. It's why I prepare daily e-mails to make sure you have an opportunity for steady input to call you to God's Word and to prayer.

And *above* all of that, it's why we—just like they did—"keep right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." This is *God's work!* How *marvelous* to be a part of what God is doing in our world! Are you "all in"? I hope so! Chapter 6 is going to tell us a little bit about what to do when we are "all in" and we're trying to get our arms around all of the needs and all of the opportunities in that. And we will continue next time the Lord brings us together, Lord willing.

Let's pray:

Oh, our Father, thank You for Your power, as it was manifested in what we have seen today. Thank You for making it so clear that the enemies persecute those who proclaim the Word. And thank You for the progress of the Gospel, that You will continue to "build" Your "church." And Father, it is too marvelous for us to fathom or to put into words that You have allowed us to be part of Your work! You have given us the message of life!

Sermon Title: Power, Persecution, Progress
Scripture Text: Acts 5:12-42 (Acts #12)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-23-23

Oh, Father, please, create opportunities for us, even this week, to speak Your "truth in love"—even if it might bring short-term unpleasant complications. In the long run, the most important thing we can do is: introduce people to our wonderful Savior. So have Your way in our lives, we pray, all to that end, in Jesus' name. Amen.