

**Acts 5: 27-32; “The Freedom to Proclaim Christ”, Sermon # 20 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have now reached one of the most important parts of the teaching of the Book of Acts; that part which is related to what each and every preacher who is attempting to be faithful to the word of God ought to do when he is told that he cannot teach any longer in the name of Jesus. The answer is, that he ought always to obey God rather than men. This principle applies not just to preachers, but to all Christians. Obedience to God is always more important and more essential to living the Christian life, than is obedience to men. We are not ultimately serving men in everything that we do; we are serving the Lord God. We should have a regard for God’s authority in human government, and love our neighbor as ourselves. In doing so, however, as we have regard for these laws made by men, we must also remember that God’s law is always higher than man’s. And therefore, every preacher of the gospel ought to be ready to address the leaders of the political government or the Church, when God leads Him into such situations. He must attempt to address them, as Peter did, concerning where they have fallen short, superseded, or broken the law of God. This is also the God-given responsibility of every Christian according to their level of understanding and the gifts which God has given to them. And so, you and I who are Christians need to understand that there may be times in which we will need to engage in this responsibility, if we live in a free country like ours. So this morning I want to speak to you about the freedom to proclaim Christ. 1<sup>st</sup>, I would like to show you that the freedom to proclaim Christ normally takes place in a “temple” setting. (verses 24-26) 2<sup>ndly</sup> – I want to show you that this freedom is sometimes challenged by wicked religious men. (verses 27 and 28) And 3<sup>rd</sup> - That this freedom to preach and to be a witness for Jesus Christ both comes from the Holy Spirit and is witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. (verses 29-32)

**1<sup>st</sup>, I would like to show you that the freedom to proclaim Christ normally takes place in a “temple” setting.**

Verse 24 says, “Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.” “So one came and told them, saying, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’” Now, we need to understand that all that was happening here was as a result of God’s work through Peter and the church at Jerusalem, working together, to witness publicly to the truth, in order to see people saved from their sins. Not everyone is called to preach publicly. Not everyone should preach the gospel publicly. And even those who are called to preach publicly are not called to go and constantly hound unbelieving people at public events trying to get them to consider coming to Jesus. That is not how this

early Church behaved. They knew that God was to be worshiped with reverence. This early Church, you can see from these verses here in Chapter 5, were faithful to set aside these times for worship from the beginning of the Church, in the temple there at Jerusalem. I would assume that they worshiped from the beginning on the first day of the week, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. But verse 42 of this Chapter tells us that “daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”. They would be witnesses in their worship to what God was calling to them to do, both as ministers and as a group of Christians. They did greatly desire to be faithful witnesses to their own kinsmen according the flesh, and this is why God would have them come to the temple to preach, and to hear the preaching of, the word of God. It was so that God would be honored, worshiped, and obeyed in accordance with His word, the Holy Scriptures, for it was His temple, even though it had been taken over by false worshipers. These new believers were faithful to attend upon the preaching of the word of God through the Apostles; they were faithful to bring others to the temple and to the places where Peter and the other Apostles were ministering the word of God. “They were all of one accord in Solomon’s Porch it says in verse 12 of Chapter 5. They gathered there in the portico of the temple. They prayed and hoped for their fellow countrymen to be saved. They brought them to be healed of their physical infirmities as the Lord was granting that the miracles would take place by Peter’s hands, but all of this healing was only done, by God’s appointment and working, so that there would be a greater heed given to the preaching of the Word of God which was the constant ministry that that these Apostles were called to engage in. It was the Lord who had ordained this work and He was working it out through them. This was not the simple zeal of Christians going about to stick the gospel in the face of every unbelieving person in Jerusalem. It was the building of the Church of His Beloved Son.

Let me apply it to you this way; the end of all preaching and teaching is that you may live your life to the glory of God. The object in your living your Christian life to the glory of God is not simply soul-winning. It is learning “all the words of this life”. The Bible says it is “he who is wise who will win souls”. True soul winning is not simply distributing tracts or confronting people with their sinfulness, or telling them to believe. It is a matter of thinking of how you personally can be faithful to God as His witness. It comes from your thinking about how you might glorify God by being a disciple, and a learner, when it comes to your witness to people. Your best witness to people will be in your regular attendance at church. It will be established in your listening to good Expository preaching of the Bible, and in learning all the precious truths which are taught to you by a faithful pastor. It will come to fruition when you apply these truths of the gospel and the word of God to your own life. And then, as you live them out, you will then become more qualified to speak, and to be a true soul-winner. You will find that you will be most useful to your Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, when you

can take that teaching which has been given to you, and then begin to privately teach and help others to apply it to their lives. It is being faithful to do that, that you will find your greatest soul-winning taking place. The Great Commission given to the Apostles by our Lord Jesus Christ was not, “Go therefore and preach and give altar calls and call people to make decisions for Jesus, among all the nations...” No it was, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” Making disciples takes much preaching over many years. There is more to being a Christian disciple than conversion. Being a disciple is becoming a learner and a doer of the word of God in the context of a local church.

Some Christian men are called to preach and to pastor. The Apostles set a good example for every pastor in this regard. It was through the preaching of the word in the temple that they would attempt to win people to Christ. That is, they preached in the setting of a building which was accessible to the public, where Christ might be publicly proclaimed; and yet it was a place that, usually, the people might gather together and worship and learn quietly together as a congregation. This is God’s ordinary and regular means of how He communicates grace to His people, even today. The object in all this is not that people will be provoked by the truth, but that people will learn the truth, and preaching is that vehicle which God has decided to use in connection with the calling of people to Himself in salvation; people who will make up Christ’s holy Church. It is in that context of the Church gathering in a Church building that Christ’s cause is primarily intended by God to go forward in a public manner. It is often in this context that the unbelieving may come or be brought by friends or relatives. It is there that they will learn that our God is the only true and living God. It is there that they will learn that Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son. It is there that they will learn more and more doctrinal and practical truth, as they begin to attend more regularly. This is how people come to learn that our Christ is only way to know God and walk with God. For in all of our teaching and preaching it is He whom we preach, and together we proclaim Him by word and by deed, that He is our life. We preach Christ in order to proclaim the love of God; that He would show such saving mercy to fallen men by sending His Son so that we might find this eternal life, and then live holy lives of useful service to Him here while we walk upon the earth. We preach in order that needy sinful people might see that we, as believers together make up the family of God who care for their well-being; body, soul, and spirit. It is God who has placed us together in this context as a church. The church is not the building, but the church needed a building even in the beginning. They used the temple, and they used the setting of people’s homes in which to teach and preach the truth about Jesus, and the truth of how to live the Christian life. There was reverence toward God in the worship and there was love in the their hearts for their fellow men. In that context God gave them the freedom to preach Christ.

**2<sup>nd</sup> - I would like to show you that the freedom to proclaim Christ is sometimes challenged by wicked religious men.** (Verses 27 and 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?’ And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!’ “But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” There are many people in this world who do not like the freedom of true religion. The proof of it, in our day, is how the expression of Christianity is suppressed in its most public forms. Many are opposed to public prayers in the name of Jesus, but they are more especially opposed to the public preaching of Jesus by those who are bold enough to undertake it. The Jewish leaders, the chief priests, the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees and all the rest of the Jewish people should have received the united witness of the Apostles and the faithful believers who were with them in the temple that day. But instead they were indignant and envious. In verse 33 it says that after Peter preached, “they were furious and plotted to kill them.” The Apostles were hated by the Jewish leaders of that time because what they were preaching and doing was refuting and exposing everything that was false in the religion of those proud and self-righteous men. They did not want to see their false system of religion fall apart, or the people turn away from them to follow Jesus. They cannot even take His name upon their lips, but call him “This Man.” So here we find that because they are clinging to what is false, they are opposing God Himself, the One whom they professed to know and worship. They were indignant and angry at the thought that they were being told that they were wrong in their thinking. They did not see their need of Christ, nor of their need to have a New Heart. They thought that they were pleasing to God because they went along with the religious establishment of that day. And the religious establishment of that day was preaching a works righteousness.

Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 10, and verse 1. Here we find the Apostle Paul’s earnest desire for the salvation of His fellow countrymen the Jews. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” “For Christ is the end of righteousness for everyone who believes.” Paul tells us that they had zeal, but it was not in accordance with knowledge. Take care, my brethren that your zeal be according to the knowledge of the Bible. There is such a thing as righteous indignation, but there is also a sinful anger which does not accomplish the righteousness of God. These religious leaders of our text had the latter. The worst of sinners are zealous religious people who trust in their own ritual religion and expect others to blindly follow them in that religion which they have attempted to make up around the true religion of Christianity. Salvation was from the Jews, but it was only really and actually realized in having their having faith in what God would do for them through Jesus Christ. Ever since the fall of

Adam in the Garden of Eden, true religion has never been what men could do according to their own thoughts of themselves or what they could accomplish by their own righteous works, without faith in the promise of what God would do for them by grace in His promised Messiah. These leaders would have people accept their false notions of how God thinks about our own righteousness. They think that He somehow approves of it. They think that if a person simply tries to do what is right in his own fleshly strength and according to his own fleshly wisdom, that he can somehow vindicate himself in relation to the judgment of God against sin. It was this self-justifying mindset that prevailed with these men who now sought to stop what the Apostles were doing when they preached Jesus and all the words of this life. But the gospel was going to go forward, and it would go forward right in the midst of all of the opposition of those who were teaching what was false. There was so much false religion in Jerusalem in that day; men in positions of spiritual and political power and authority, who hated the light of truth being shined down upon them. They had no reason to hate it except that they knew that the light of the truth about Jesus always exposes men's inability to justify themselves in the sight of God. The gospel light shows people that they are sinners. The same will be true today as we live out all the words of this life. I suppose that you understand that our country has in a definite way moved toward challenging the freedoms which Christians have always had in this country to preach Christ publicly. People will often say to us, "Do you not understand that there is separation of Church and State?" "You cannot pray or preach in this name of Jesus." But we must obey God rather than man, no matter what happens in this regard. There never was such a thing as "the separation of Church and State" that was ever put into the Constitution of these United States. The closest thing that is found to the phrase, "the Separation of Church and State" is found at the close of one of the letters of Thomas Jefferson in his 1802 letter to the Danbury (Connecticut) Baptists: "The congregation heard a widespread rumor that the Congregationalists, another denomination, were to become the national religion. This was very alarming to people who knew about religious persecution in England by the state established church. Jefferson made it clear in his letter to the Danbury Congregation that the separation was to be that government would not establish a national religion or dictate to men how to worship God.

Jefferson's letter, from which the phrase "separation of church and state" was taken, was actually written to affirm first amendment rights. Jefferson wrote: "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between a man and his god, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their "legislature" should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and State." "Adhering to this expression of the

supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.” “The reason Jefferson choose the expression “separation of church and state” was because he was addressing a Baptist congregation; a denomination of which he was not a member.” “Jefferson wanted to remove all fears that the state would make dictates to the church.” “He was establishing common ground with the Baptists by borrowing the words of Roger Williams, one of the Baptist's own prominent preachers.” “Williams had said: ‘When they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the Church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, and made his garden a wilderness, as at this day.’ “And that therefore if He will e’er please to restore His garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto Himself from the world...” “The "wall" was understood as one-directional; its purpose was to protect the church from the state.” “The world was not to corrupt the church, yet the church was free to teach the people Biblical values.” (end of quote)

Beloved brethren. We are still a free people if we will not neglect our solemn responsibility to preach and to support the public preaching of the word of God. The 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment is still true: “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of a religion, or the free exercise of the same.” Let us insist upon this even when challenged with this imaginary phrase, “The separation of Church and State. We must not be afraid of this, but we must remember that it is God who is actually giving us our freedom to worship. Never be ashamed to end your public prayers with the name of Jesus. Never sit to listen to preachers who are preachers of self-help, or merely moralistic preachers; men who will not preach Christ in all of His fullness of grace and truth; His perfection in righteousness and His death on the cross. Only Jesus Christ can give the power to lead a godly life. Men must preach Jesus as the Bible sets Him forth, or they will be unfaithful to God and false in their statements to men. God sent his angel to release Peter and the apostles when they were jailed, and the thing that he said to them was not, “Go back and preach to the people that “God helps those who can and will help themselves.” It was, “Go stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

That was the thing which God wanted them to do. He wanted them to keep preaching and proclaiming that Jesus Christ was Lord and that He was risen from the dead, and that He is the only Savior of sinners. God knows that sinners are helpless and unable to save themselves apart from the grace of Christ. He knows that they are in a prison of their own making. And if they will believe in false doctrine and are deceived into thinking that this is the way to be right with God, then they will also put others in prison to stop their mouths when they preach Jesus. There was a great miracle attendant to the Apostle’s release here; a miracle which the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests could not understand,

and which they did not know what the outcome of it would be. The Lord Himself, through His angel had given these men the freedom to preach. They dared not shrink back from it, even when these wicked religious men had challenged it. “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?” And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” What did the Apostles say to this? How did they respond? Peter, answering for all of the Apostles says, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” It is a good thing when our Jerusalem is filled up with the good doctrine of the word of God. It’s time to preach again Peter concludes. And Peter goes on to preach them a very short concise sermon. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.” “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” He preached to them Jesus as He was in truth, raised from the dead, the very One whom they had murdered through having Him crucified. Let us forever hold to this doctrine as a church; to Christ and Him crucified; Christ and Him raised from the dead. Let us fill our cities with it. Let us preach for conviction of sin. It was these wicked men who had Jesus nailed to the cross, and they were guilty of his blood. But still they could be forgiven, even having committed this, the worst of crimes. It is the people around us for whom Christ had to die. It is their sins which led Him to the tree. God has exalted Jesus to His own right hand to be a Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” What tremendous words of blessing and hope to these wicked men, and yet Peter’s words still did not pierce the hearts of these men to lead them to repentance of their great crimes or change the wickedness of their hearts. And this leads me to say –

**3rdly - That this freedom to preach and to be a witness for Jesus Christ both comes from the Holy Spirit and is witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.**

(verse 32)

“And we are His witnesses to these things,” says Peter, “and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.” They had been witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, but Peter did not want to just leave it at that. He wanted these men to know that there was another witness, a greater witness who was the One who had given him the freedom and the boldness to declare these things about Jesus with definite power and authority. It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit. It is amazing how the Holy Spirit can so work through the preaching of the word to turn the tables on wicked men who have the stoutest hearts. These unbelieving men had not obeyed the gospel. Therefore they did not have the Holy Spirit, because He is only given when we obey God’s voice speaking to us in the gospel. They were guilty of having put to the death the Lord Jesus, and now they, who were thinking that they had Peter and the Apostles on trial, were actually sensing that they themselves had been tried and found guilty. This freedom, to preach and to declare these things was given to Peter and the Apostles by the Holy Spirit Himself who became a witness of to this whole

proceeding. Let us remember, as Christians who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, and have witnessed first hand His power to change our lives, that the Holy Spirit is also with us when we obey Christ's word in the gospel and in His command to go therefore and preach the gospel to every creature. It is He who truly gives us the freedom to preach and the liberty to declare that Jesus is Lord, and that all men should submit to Him and believe in Him now, while they hear the gospel.