

Obeying God Rather Than Men

Text: Acts 5:22-32

Introduction:

Having been given boldness by God, the Apostles returned to Solomon's Porch (in the Temple), to proclaim the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit attested to the validity of the message, by working signs and wonders through the hands of the Apostles. They were gaining a hearing and an increased following. The High Priest and the Jewish officials found out about what was going on, and being motivated by jealousy, they came and arrested the Apostles, throwing them into the common prison. An interrogation would begin the next day, after the Sanhedrin (including the Sadducees and the elders of the people) were gathered together for the trial.

However, an angel from God, came and opened the doors of the prison and brought them out, freeing the Apostles to be able to continue their Gospel labors. For, they were commanded to go back to the temple, and to preach to the people the, "Words of this life." Early the next morning, they came to the temple and began preaching the Gospel once again. We left off last time, as the Sanhedrin counsel had gathered together, and sent for the Apostles to be brought to them, from out of the prison.

However, much to the amazement of the officers and the Sanhedrin, the Apostles were nowhere to be found at the prison. In fact, they indeed found the prison doors securely shut and the guards properly stationed at each entryway, but the Apostles were still nowhere to be found. While this presented them with a great mystery, which ought to have sustained their concern the whole time, we will find that they wind up passing right over the miracle that has taken place, once they are given the present location of the Apostles, which happens to be back in the temple where they were first arrested, which again, ought to have boggled their minds with amazement and careful consideration. But sin, and especially the sin of jealousy, has a way of covering over even the obvious, in order to finish running its course.

I. Obeying God Rather Than Men

As the religious leaders pondered what could have possibly happened to the prisoners, someone finally came and told them that they were back in the temple, teaching the people again. At this point, you might still wonder why they don't ponder further, *how* the Apostles escaped a securely sealed prison, but again, sin often blinds us from the obvious considerations of life, such as, "How is it that these men are performing miracles...etc?"

The captain of the guard and the officers then return to the temple, to take the Apostles into custody once again. Only, this time they are going to do it in a non-violent fashion, as they realize more and more that the general population (within the temple) have come to greatly respect the Apostles. The leaders feared being stoned by the people, so they came in a more reasonable and non-threatening fashion, hoping to not make a scene. Does this remind you of another similar circumstance from the NT Scriptures? How about the arrest of Jesus? Did not the religious leaders wait for the opportune time to take Jesus into custody, apart from the presence of the people? Judas, in fact, became an integral part of their plan, didn't he, as they paid him to betray Jesus, when He was in a more private location, out of the sight of the people. Again, all of this just reveals the deceptive and hardened nature of the hearts of the religious leaders, who had no genuine concern for the glory of God. Their "religiosity" was becoming more and more evident by their actions. When a "love of self" and selfish ambition, supersedes a love of God in the soul, it will eventually make its way out, when pressed by providence.

And so, the Apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin, and the interrogation continues. [Read verses 27-28]. Here we have a reiteration of the command that was originally given, "Did we not order you not to preach in this Name...?" But brethren, notice how their inner self-serving motives, which drove this command, spill out, yet again. "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" Ahhh! Here is a further revelation into the heart, is it not? If you proclaim the Name of this Man (notice, they cannot even say His Name here), then you will bring His blood upon us! We condemned Him to death! Now, you proclaim that He has been raised from the dead by God, and your proclamation is accompanied by these wondrous signs! What will the people think of us? They will accuse us of wrong, bringing the guilt of His bloodshed upon us!"

You see, brethren, the option of repentance is not even on the table for these men, is it? The only way to repentance is by means of the gateway of humility and self-abasement. The religious leaders must acknowledge that what they have done is wrong, indeed, grossly, horribly,

wickedly wrong, if they are to find grace! And sadly, if they did this, they would find grace. But that is not an option for them, because they are unwilling to let go of their pride. They would have to acknowledge before all of the people, that they have grossly sinned all along; that they have been self-righteous hypocrites, who in truth, are no better than anyone else, if they are to find the way of salvation, which was so marvelously displayed before them! Notice how hard the human heart really is, brethren! Only a "Holy Spirit wrought" miracle of grace, could break and humble the heart of man, unto this end! Be thankful, that you have experienced such a gracious humbling, yourself! And consider the magnitude of lostness, which still engulfs most in this world!

Notice as well the irony here! They are concerned that Jesus' blood would be upon them; that they would be seen as guilty murderers of the innocent. But they themselves have already boldly called for such a responsibility, in the presence of Pilate, have they not? [Read Matthew 27:15-26 (emph. vs. 25)].

Note as well, the charge, "You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" (vs. 28). Indeed, the work of Christ was being accomplished, beginning with Jerusalem, spilling out into all of Judea, soon to make its way into Samaria and the ends of the earth! [Remember Acts 1:8]. Who is really building the church, at any expense? Christ! He was active then, and He continues to be active today, in completing the work, for which He has died to accomplish!

How then do the Apostles respond to the accusation of the Sanhedrin? [Read verses 29-32]:

"We ought to obey God rather than men!" Even as the religious leaders restate their command, the Apostles restate their response. "Indeed, we have respect for all authority, but we cannot place any authority above the authority of God. He is our highest Authority, and we will obey Him, without respect to any threat that would seek to compel us to do otherwise. We must preach Christ!" "The God of our fathers; the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel and Moses has raised up the Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. And God has exalted Him to His right hand as Prince (as the universal Ruler over all things, containing all authority in heaven and on earth), and as Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

"How can we stop proclaiming the Name of Jesus, when He is the all-sovereign Ruler over all things, and the only way of salvation for all people? It is through Him that repentance and forgiveness of sins is proclaimed and granted to Israel." "And we are His witnesses in this

respect, as also is the Holy Spirit, who raised Him from the dead, who attests to His resurrection through miraculous signs and wonders, and who is given by God to all who obey Him. Even you, who have murdered this Jesus, can yet find repentance and forgiveness of sins in this Jesus! The guilt of His bloodshed is indeed upon you, but the cleansing power of that blood can be upon you as well!"

Isn't it ironic, brethren, that the religious leaders were concerned about having the "blood of Christ upon their heads," when they desperately needed the blood of Christ to be upon their hearts? The guilt of His bloodshed could only be cured by the very blood that was shed! And so, there seems to be an irony here, in that, the religious leaders were concerned about inheriting the guilt for which they were guilty, but were unwilling to have that guilt removed by embracing the crucified and risen Christ, who alone could save them!

II. Concluding Applications

1) The Holy Spirit's witness, always accompanies our witness (not necessarily by miraculous signs and wonders, but by empowering us and enlightening our listeners-- conviction...etc).

2) Notice the hardness of the human heart. Signs and wonders were worked through the Apostles...the opposition could not deny this (remember the lame man!). The Apostles were brought out of a securely sealed prison! The Apostles exercised a supernatural boldness (they went back to preach, yet again, in the temple, with no concern for their own lives! None of this convinced the religious leaders of their wrong! They were hardened, and unless they believed "Moses and the Prophets," though One "rise from the dead," they still would not believe!

3) Notice the necessity of the atonement! Jesus must be proclaimed as the Prince and Ruler of all, as well as the ONLY Savior! AMEN!!!