

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon September 11, 2022

Acts 5: 17 – 21 “The Futility of Rebellion Against God”

12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. 16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, 18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." 21 And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" 24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. 25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 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!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

I. Introduction

- a. “How does the grace of God work in our lives? Martin Luther said that to understand God’s grace you should picture yourself as a caterpillar that’s trying to crawl out from a ring of fire. Grace is when someone picks you up and carries you over the fire. You can’t save yourself. Your only help is help from above. To get grace, you have to start by admitting you are caught in a ring of fire with no hope of saving yourself. You have to know that you have a desperate need, and that only Jesus Christ has the power to pick you up and save you.” (“Saving Grace, Daily Devotions by Jack Miller”)
  - i. Have you ever considered the source of your passion? The goals of your passion? Do you have a Biblically-informed zeal based upon faith in Christ? Or, perhaps a mixed zeal, partly of the flesh, partly from faith in Christ?

- b. Acts 5: 17 – 21 “The Futility of Rebellion Against God”
  - i. Sinful Zeal - Deceived v17
  - ii. Sinful Zeal – Displayed v18
  - iii. The Zeal of the Lord Conquers – v19,20
  - iv. The Zeal of the Lord’s Beloved – v21
  - v. The Futility of Rebellion Against God – v21
  - vi. Questions to know, love and obey God
- II. Sinful Zeal - Deceived v17
  - a. “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation”
  - b. So, the apostate Jewish leaders are so blinded by their false beliefs they are unable to see the Kingdom of God coming forth in the streets of Jerusalem and the surrounding towns. Neither widespread healings or total victory over demonic forces could change their perspective, nor did they give any credence to the multitudes flowing into God’s Church. They are locked up in the mind-prison of their own self-deception.
    - i. “The high priest was the ringleader, Annas or Caiaphas, who saw their wealth and dignity, their power and tyranny, that is, their all, at stake, and inevitably lost, if the spiritual and heavenly doctrine of Christ should get ground and prevail among the people. Those that were most forward to join with the high priest herein were the *sect of the Sadducees*, who had a particularly enmity to the gospel of Christ, because it confirmed and established the doctrine of the invisible world, the resurrection of the dead, and the future state, which they denied. It is not strange if men of no religion be bigoted in their opposition to true and pure religion.”<sup>1</sup>
  - c. Indignation = ζῆλος
    - i. excitement of mind, ardour, fervour of spirit
      - 1. zeal, ardour in embracing, pursuing, defending anything
        - a. zeal in behalf of, for a person or thing
        - b. the fierceness of indignation, punitive zeal
      - 2. an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy
  - d. Sinful Zeal = not according to knowledge
    - i. Romans 10:1-4 “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 (ζῆλος) 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 the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”
      - 1. Anyone can have zeal for God, even for the One true God, and yet be simultaneously deceived and dangerous to the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2083.

- a. This zeal of self-deception arises from a different motive than the godly zeal of Christ and His Church.
2. Sinful zeal arises from an ignorance of God's righteousness combined with the belief that one's own lawful works can establish one's own righteousness before God.
  - a. God's righteousness is perfection, sinlessness, purity and constant selfless love. It cannot be obtained via human effort.
    - i. Romans 3:21-23 "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."
  - b. Not understanding this invincible reality, the ignorant Jews (and those like them) set off on a futile quest to establish their own righteousness before God, via following the Law of God.
  - c. So, at bottom, sinful zeal is driven by self-righteousness. This is very dangerous to the Church, but in the long run, it is most dangerous to the self-righteous who do not repent.
3. This deception about the source of righteousness before God leads to a refusal to submit to the righteousness of God, which is to say a refusal to submit to Christ's provision of God's righteousness via faith. "To everyone who believes" says Romans 10:4. The rebellion against God and His Church is a refusal to submit to the Gospel of Christ, a refusal to admit that saving righteousness via works is impossible.
  - ii. Paul had this sinful zeal against the Church before his conversion
    1. Phil 3:3-6 "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 *concerning zeal*, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."
  - iii. "*Indignation*, or zeal, which is the best when kindled (as the fire on the altar) from heaven, regularly acting for God's truth and word; and the

worst when inflamed by carnal affections, and set upon wrong objects for self-ends.”<sup>2</sup>

e. Godly Zeal = according to knowledge

i. The Lord Jesus Christ

1. John 2:13-17 “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.””

ii. The Zeal of God

1. Heb 10:26-31 “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and *fiery indignation* which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on [the testimony of] two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

iii. The Zeal of God's People

1. 2 Co 7:9-11 “Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. 10 For godly sorrow produces repentance [leading] to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, *what zeal*, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”

III. Sinful Zeal - Displayed v18

- a. 18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Poole, [Annotations upon the Holy Bible](#), vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 399.

- b. What happens when the deceived zeal overflows? The apostate Jewish leaders misuse their power and attack God and His Church. This idea of selfish zeal may also contain the concept of envy. They did not want to lose their position of power, influence and wealth. They desire to shut this movement down immediately.
  - i. "To put a disgrace upon them, and therefore they chose to clap them up in the common prison, that, being thus vilified, the people might not, as they had done, magnify them. Satan has carried on his design against the gospel very much by making the preachers and professors of it appear despicable."<sup>3</sup>

#### IV. The Zeal of the Lord Conquers - v19,20

- a. 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."
  - i. While the leaders of the lost Jews scheme and use their earthly powers, the Lord's pure zeal accomplishes His plans via His matchless might.
    1. Isa 9:6-7 "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of [His] government and peace [There will be] no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. *The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*"
    2. The Sadducees had their servants arrest and imprison the apostles in a prison strong enough to hold them, if only earthly zeal and power are in view. But, the Sadducees did not account for the zeal and power of the risen Christ and His Father poured out from heaven. Again, all the themes of Psalm 2 are again in view for us today.
    3. Psalm 2:1-12 "Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, [saying], 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." 7 "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You [are] My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give [You] The nations [for] Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth [for] Your possession. 9

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2083.

You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' " 10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish [in] the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed [are] all those who put their trust in Him."

4. "The apostles are discharged, legally discharged, from their imprisonment (v. 19): *The angel of the Lord by night*, in spite of all the locks and bars that were upon them, *opened the prison doors*, and, in spite of all the vigilance and resolution of the keepers that *stood without before the doors, brought forth* the prisoners (see v. 23), gave them authority to go out without crime, and led them through all opposition. This deliverance is not so particularly related as that of Peter (ch. 12:7, etc.); but the miracle here was the very same. Note, There is no prison so dark, so strong, but God can both visit his people in it, and, if he pleased, fetch them out of it. This discharge of the apostles out of prison by an angel was a resemblance of Christ's resurrection, and his discharge out of the prison of the grave, and would help to confirm the apostles' preaching of it."<sup>4</sup>
- ii. The purpose of the imprisonment was to silence the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The purpose of their miraculous freedom is to continue the mission Jesus gave them. "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."
  1. The Lord Jesus Christ shows here that neither He nor His Father will allow for the Gospel to be muzzled if His people are faithfully carrying out His mission.
  2. "They are charged, and legally charged, to go on with their work, so as thereby go be discharged from the prohibition which the high priest laid them under; the angel bade them, *Go, stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life*, v. 20. When they were miraculously set at liberty, they must not think it was that they might save their lives by making their escape out of the hands of their enemies. No; it was that they might to on with their work with so much the more boldness. Recoveries from sickness, releases out of trouble, are granted us, and are to be looked upon by us as granted, not that we may enjoy the comforts of our life, but that God may be honoured with the services of our life"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2083.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2083.

V. The Zeal of the Lord's Beloved - v21

- a. 21 And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught.
  - i. Note again here the miraculous boldness of the apostles. They obey the angel's voice. They do not run away, even though they are facing the same human institutions that murdered Jesus Christ. They are not controlled by the threats against them. They have a passion that flows from knowledge of Christ, His life, death, resurrection, and reign, and they are zealous to obey His commands.
  - ii. "*When they heard this, when they heard that it was the will of God that they should continue to preach in the temple, they returned to Solomon's porch, v. 12. 1. It was a great satisfaction to them to have these fresh orders. Perhaps they began to question whether, if they had their liberty, they should preach as publicly in the temple as they had done, because they had been told, when they were persecuted in one city, to flee to another. But, now that the angel ordered them to go preach in the temple, their way was plain, and they ventured without any difficulty, entered into the temple, and feared not the face of man. Note, If we may but be satisfied concerning our duty, our business is to keep close to this, and then we may cheerfully trust God with our safety.*"<sup>6</sup>

VI. The Futility of Rebellion Against God - v21

- a. "But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought."
- b. The forces of self-righteous zeal go forward with their plan, not aware they are searching the prison in vain, not aware that they have no power to seize or imprison unless granted by God. They plot in vain. They even expand their court at this point, hoping to bring down much greater fear and punishment this time.
  - i. "How they were disappointed, and had their faces filled with shame: *He that sits in heaven laughs at them*, and so may we too, to see how gravely the court is set; and we may suppose the high priest makes a solemn speech to them, setting forth the occasion of their coming together—that a very dangerous faction was now lately raised at Jerusalem, by the preaching of the doctrine of Jesus, which it was needful, for the preservation of their church (which never was in such danger as now), speedily and effectually to suppress—that it was now in the power of their hands to do it, for he had the ringleaders of the faction now in the common prison, to be proceeded against, if they would but agree to it, with the utmost severity. An officer is, in order hereunto, despatched

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2083.

immediately to fetch the prisoners to the bar. But see how they are baffled.”<sup>7</sup>

VII. Questions to know, love and obey God

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2083.