

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon September 18, 2022

Acts 5: 22 – 32 “God Has Exalted Jesus to His Right Hand to be Prince and Savior”

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."

33 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 "but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it--lest you even be found to fight against God." 40 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

I. Introduction

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II. Setting: v17-21

- 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, 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."
- b. A growing and mighty Church
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- e. Angelic miracle: apostles freed and returned to the temple to preach
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 - i. "The high priest and his party went on with their prosecution, v. 21. They, supposing they had the apostles sure enough, *called the council together*, a great and extraordinary council, for they summoned *all the senate of the children of Israel*. See here, 1. How they were prepared, and how big with expectation, to crush the gospel of Christ and the preachers of it, for they raised the whole posse. The last time they had the apostles in custody they convened them only before a committee of those that were of the kindred of the high priest, who were obliged to act cautiously; but now, that they might proceed further and with more assurance, they called together, *pasan tēn gerousian—all the eldership*, that is (says Dr. Lightfoot), all the three courts or benches of judges in Jerusalem, not only the great sanhedrim, consisting of seventy elders, but the other two judicatories that were erected one in the outer-court gate of the temple, the other in the inner or beautiful gate, consisting of twenty-three judges each; so that, if there was a full appearance, here were one hundred and sixteen judges. Thus God ordered it, that the confusion of the enemies, and the apostles' testimony against them, might be more public, and that those might hear the gospel who would not hear it otherwise than from the bar. Howbeit, the high priest *meant not so, neither did his heart think so*; but it was in his heart to rally all his forces against the apostles, and by a universal consent to cut them all off at once.¹

III. The report of the empty prison v22,23

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

- a. “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!”
 - i. So, the gathering of the entire Jewish leadership awaits the apostles, having sent their temple security team to bring the apostles from the prison. But, the temple security officers do not find the apostles. What do they find? The prison was shut up securely, with no signs of forced entry or exit. The prison guards were at their posts, with no reports of anything unusual during their watch.
 - ii. “Christians may experience divine protection in the midst of suffering. The apostles were rescued from prison through an angel of the Lord. Christians will always rely on God, who has not promised, however, that he will always deliver his people from harm in persecutions. A few months after this episode Stephen is killed, and ten years or so later James, one of the Twelve, is executed in another wave of persecution, in the course of which Peter escapes through another miracle involving an angel. Few Christians who were in prisons and in labor camps in the Soviet Union and in the People’s Republic of China experienced miraculous escapes—but they received divine strength to bear the suffering with patience, faithfulness, and joy.”²

IV. God’s enemies perplexed v24

- a. “Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.”
- b. “wondered” = διαπορέω = to be entirely at loss, to be in perplexity
 - i. Another translation says, “When the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard this report, they were **at a loss** concerning this information, wondering what this might lead to”³
 - ii. Acts 2:12 “So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?””
 - iii. The Jewish leaders have heard the facts of the situation, and they are unable to reckon a solution. Using their own beliefs and commitments, they remain unable to explain the facts.
 - 1. “Those often distress and embarrass themselves that think to distress and embarrass the cause of Christ.”⁴
- c. “What the outcome would be”

² Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:17–42.

³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:24.

⁴ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

- i. Part of the reason for their confusion is their inability to pause and consider the facts at hand. Instead, their envious minds are rushing ahead, worried about how these facts will impact their power, possessions and prospects.
 - ii. “The demonstrative pronoun in the phrase ...can refer to the disappearance of the apostles which they cannot explain, or to the movement of which they are the leaders and which the Sanhedrin does not seem to be able to control. The possibility that a higher power is involved does not occur to them.”⁵
- V. The report about the prisoners: free and preaching v25
 - a. “So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!””
 - b. The council’s anxious perplexity is interrupted by more facts they cannot explain. Playing chess with God never works out well. Where do they find the apostles? They have returned to the temple to teach the people about Jesus Christ, just like the angel commanded them.
 - i. “their vexation is increased by another messenger, who brings them word that their prisoners are preaching in the temple (v. 25): *“Behold, the men whom you put in prison, ... are now hard by you here, standing in the temple, under your nose and in defiance of you, teaching the people.”* Prisoners, that have broken prison, usually abscond, for fear of being retaken; but these prisoners, that here made their escape, dare to show their faces even where their persecutors have the greatest influence. Now this confounded them more than anything. Common malefactors may have art enough to break prison; but those are uncommon ones that have courage enough to avow it when they have so done.”⁶
- VI. The captain retrieves the apostles v26
 - a. “Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.”
 - b. The entire Jewish leadership remains committed to their plan to interrogate the apostles. Their goal is to stop the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They will not let go of their sinful zeal, even in the face of a perplexing occurrence. Jesus not only comforts His apostles by delivering them from prison, but in His mercy and kindness, He offers another opportunity for the hard-hearted Jewish leadership to pause and reconsider. But, instead, they ignore the power of Christ and rush headlong into more rebellion.
 - c. Neither the temple security team nor the apostles use violence during this arrest. The Jewish leaders are afraid of the people because the people hold the Church in high regard. Even those who are not believers have heard of the

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:24.

⁶ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

mighty miracles, the healings, the demons cast out, and Ananias and Sapphira falling down dead at the apostles' feet.

- i. In addition, the Jewish security team senses they could be stoned by the people if they use violence against the apostles. This situation could explode into riotous violence, but both the Jewish officers and the apostles avoid violence.
- ii. "The support and sympathy of the inhabitants of Jerusalem for the apostles had been noted in v. 13. The Sanhedrin officials fear a public lynching if they are not careful in the second arrest of the apostles. Whether some of the believers in Jesus who were undoubtedly present as well would have been willing to use force against the Sanhedrin officials is a possibility, although Luke consistently describes the followers of Jesus in Acts as suffering willingly, on occasion insisting on their rights (cf. Acts 16:37–39; 22:25–29), but never as using force, in keeping with Jesus' directive in Luke 22:50–51."⁷

VII. The apostles set before the council v27,28

- a. 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!"
 - i. The apostles are set before this body of judges, perhaps over a hundred gathered. Another very intimidating scene. The very setting screams danger and threats to the apostles.
 - ii. "The Twelve are taken into the council hall and placed in front of the Sanhedrin. They are made to stand where Peter and John had stood several weeks earlier (4:7), and where Jesus had stood during his trial (Luke 22:66). After the first attempt to interrogate the apostles several hours earlier in the morning session of the Sanhedrin, the high priest is finally able to question these people who dared defy the ban on speaking that the Jewish leaders had issued when Peter had been arrested and interrogated (4:1–18). The fact that the high priest himself begins the interrogation indicates, from the point of view of the Jewish leaders, the seriousness of the situation that the preaching and teaching of the apostles and the numerous miracles which have taken place in Jerusalem and in other towns in Judea have caused."⁸
- b. The high priest's question: "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?"

⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:26.

⁸ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:27.

- i. The high priest is referring back to the prior command given to Peter and John in Acts 4:18 “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”
 - 1. The council assumes their authority must be obeyed by these Jewish men who are teaching in the temple. The council assumes they have unquestionable authority over the temple and its teaching.
 - ii. The apostles had already given their reply to that assumption in 4:19,20 “But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”
 - iii. “Thus those who make void the commandments of God are commonly very strict in binding on their own commandments, and insisting upon their own power: *Did not we command you?* Yes, they did; but did not Peter at the same time tell them that God’s authority was superior to theirs, and his commands must take place of theirs? And they had forgotten this.”⁹
- c. The high priest’s accuses the apostles of 1) false teaching and 2) false criticism of the council: “And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!”
- i. “your doctrine” – As if the high priest is saying, “Not our doctrine, not the doctrine of the Jewish nation, but some strange doctrine, some false teaching that threatens true religion.”
 - 1. “That they had spread false doctrine among the people, or at least a singular doctrine, which was not allowed by the Jewish church, nor agreed with what was delivered from Moses’s chair. *“You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and thereby have disturbed the public peace, and drawn people from the public establishment.”*¹⁰
 - ii. “to bring this Man’s blood upon us!” – As if the high priest is saying, “We are not responsible for this Man’s death. He, like you, rebelled against both Israel and Rome, and he deserved to die. We are not responsible for the death of those who bring guilt upon themselves through their own rebellion against God and His established authorities!”
 - 1. “That they had a malicious design against the government, and aimed to stir up the people against it, by representing it as wicked and tyrannical, and as having made itself justly odious both to God and man: *“You intend to bring this man’s blood, the guilt of it before God, the shame of it before men, upon us.”* Thus they

⁹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

charge them not only with contumacy and contempt of the court, but with sedition and faction, and a plot both to set the people against them, for having persecuted even to death not only so innocent but so good and great a man as this Jesus, and also the Romans, for having drawn them into it. See here how those who with a great deal of presumption will do an evil thing yet cannot bear to hear of it afterwards, nor to have it charged upon them. When they were in the heat of the persecution they could cry daringly enough, *“His blood be upon us and upon our children; let us bear the blame for ever.”* But now that they have time for a cooler thought they take it as a great affront to have his blood laid at their door.”¹¹

VIII. Peter and the apostles reply v29-32

- a. 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."
- b. First, Peter and the apostles again reference their bedrock principle of discerning commands from God’s providentially ordained authorities: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” This situation is very clear. Jesus, the Christ, their Lord, risen from the dead, ascended as King, has commanded them to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name, beginning at Jerusalem and continuing to the ends of the earth. The ruling Jewish council, contradicting their legitimate Lord, ignoring His multiple proofs of being their Messiah, specifically command the apostles NOT to teach or preach at all, anywhere, at any time, in the Name of Jesus Christ.
 - i. “If the alternative is between obeying God and obeying a government policy, disobedience to earthly authority becomes a necessity. While Christians are citizens of an earthly state, they are also citizens of heaven, whose obligations they cannot ignore. Jesus said that we need to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s but to give to God what is God’s. And if there is a conflict, God’s demands have priority.”¹²
- c. Next, Peter reiterates the reality of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. And, in so doing, he references the unity and continuity of the Church with the ancient Jewish faith shared with those of the council: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus”. This is a brotherly type of introduction to a hard reality.

¹¹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

¹² Eckhard J. Schnabel, [*Acts*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:17–42.

- i. “He calls God the *God of our fathers*, not only *ours*, but *yours*, to show that in preaching Christ they did not preach a new god, nor entice people to come and worship other gods; not did they set up an institution contrary to that of Moses and the prophets, but they adhered to the God of the Jewish fathers; and that name of Christ which they preached answered the promises made to the fathers, and the covenant God entered into with them, and the types and figures of the law he gave them. The God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, is the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*”¹³
- d. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.” – The council did indeed bring the guilt of the death of Jesus upon themselves. Peter openly declares to the entire assembled Jewish supreme court that they murdered Jesus Christ. While they did not kill him with their own hands, they used their influence, along with many lies, to have the Romans kill Christ.
 - i. “Jesus’ death is the responsibility of the Jewish leaders, who murdered Jesus by hanging him on a “cross” (ξύλον); the term is used here for the wooden pole with crossbeam which was used for crucifixions. Implying an allusion to Deut 21:22–23, Peter accuses the Jewish leaders of having treated Jesus as a dangerous criminal, as someone who is under God’s curse and who must be eliminated from God’s people. The reference to the method of Jesus’ execution is a new element in Acts. In the Second Temple period Jews used the expression “hang on a tree” for crucifixion”¹⁴
- e. “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior”
 - i. The natural flow of thought would lead to something like, “and you wicked leaders had better get your act together and obey Jesus, or He is going to come back and crush you wicked sinners.” But, instead, Peter and the apostles focus upon Christ. The Person and Work of Christ are set before the rebellious Jewish leaders. They are offered the sweet Gospel of Christ, rather than vengeful threats from the apostles. Think of it. With what depth of love did the apostles hold Christ in their hearts? With what anguish did they recall His terrible suffering, humiliation and death? Such recollections would surely call forth from the flesh the fiery hot indignation of our pride. But, instead, under the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles show forth both boldness and mercy as they make their defense in the form of a Gospel presentation.
- f. Prince = ἀρχηγός
 - i. the chief leader, prince

¹³ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

¹⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [*Acts*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:30.

- ii. one that takes the lead in anything and thus affords an example
- iii. the author
- iv. Acts 3:13-15 "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let [Him] go. 14 "But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 "and killed the **Prince of life**, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."
- v. Hebrews 2:10 "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make **the captain of their salvation** perfect through sufferings."
- vi. Hebrews 12:1,2 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares [us], and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, **the author and finisher of [our] faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."
 - 1. "Jesus is "Leader" (ἀρχηγός)—Israel's prince who shares God's authority and who initiated the restoration of the kingdom, the pioneer who opened the path to eternal life in the messianic kingdom and thus to eternal life, the Author of Life in the new covenant in which God's people enjoy the fullness of life (see on 3:15)."¹⁵
- g. Savior = σωτήρ = savior, deliverer, preserver
 - i. Used 24 times in the Greek NT
 - 1. Lk 1:24 "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."
 - 2. 1 Jn 4:14 "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world."
- h. Jesus, as Prince, is our Leader, our King, Who leads by example, making Himself our salvation. And, Jesus, as Savior, is our Deliverer, Who gave Himself to deliver us from sin, death and hell. Jesus is our King Who Saves us. He is our Savior Who leads and rules us. No sinful man could be either Prince or Savior. Jesus is both.
 - i. "Observe, There is no having Christ to be our Saviour, unless we be willing to take him for our prince. We cannot expect to be redeemed and healed by him, unless we give up ourselves to be ruled by him. The judges of old were saviours. Christ's ruling is in order to his saving, and faith takes an entire Christ, that came, not to save us in our sins, but to save us from our sins."¹⁶
- i. God has exalted Jesus to His right hand.

¹⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:31.

¹⁶ Matthew Henry, [Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

- i. Jesus, as Prince and Savior, sits at God’s right hand. He has been exalted above every other Name. No man, no council, no collected powers of the universe, seen or unseen, could ever have the right to command for His Name not to be spoken. His Name is above all Names and shall be extolled and shouted as above all, even unto all eternities, and forever.
 - 1. ““You loaded him with disgrace, but God has crowned him with honour; and ought we not to honour him whom God honours?” ... to his right hand, to sit there, to rest there, to rule there. “He has invested him with the highest authority, and therefore we must teach in his name, for God has *given him a name above every name.*””¹⁷
- j. “to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”
 - i. The apostles, while incisive with their indictment of the Jewish leaders, are no less clear in the offer of repentance and forgiveness to these same guilty Jewish leaders. These same ones who murdered the Prince of glory can be forgiven by Him. Will they receive God’s gift of repentance and forgiveness? Some will. Most do not.
 - 1. “Jesus grants Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. The purpose of God’s resurrection and exaltation of Jesus is an offer to Israel—the offer of repentance (μετάνοια), and the offer of the “forgiveness of sins” (ἄφεσις ἁμαρτιῶν). God offers salvation, not retribution, for the crucifixion of Jesus. The people of Israel, in particular her leaders, must repent of rejecting Jesus, God’s messianic Leader and Savior. In order to participate in the restoration of the kingdom of God and in the new covenant, the people of Israel must come to faith in Jesus as God’s Messiah, and thus have their sins forgiven.”¹⁸
- k. "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. The apostles close their defense by referencing their status as witnesses to “these things”. They observed Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension (exaltation). They have received the Holy Spirit from God’s throne, poured out by the Father and the Son. Thus, the Holy Spirit, via the many signs and wonders and conversions, also bears witness to Jesus as the Christ. The apostles marshal all the evidence. Sadly, instead of believing and obeying the combined testimony of the apostles, the Church, and the Triune God, the response of the council is more sinful indignation and a hunger for more innocent blood, more unbelief and rebellion.

¹⁷ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2084.

¹⁸ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [*Acts*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:31.

IX. Questions to know, love and obey God