

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon September 25, 2022

Acts 5: 33 - 42 "Gamaliel Helps the Gospel Go Forth"

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.

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

I. Introduction

- a. As we look around in today's world, we see many examples of God permitting the reign of His Son to be troubled. How can we have the proper response to the ragings of God's enemies? Let us remember the Lord's Word. He laughs at His enemies. He grants us invincible joy when we suffer shame for His Name.
- b. Calvin "When God permits the reign of his Son to be troubled, he does not cease from interfering because He is employed elsewhere, or unable to afford assistance, or because He is neglectful of the honor of His Son; but He purposely delays the inflictions of His wrath to the proper time, namely, until He has exposed their infatuated rage to general derision. Let us, therefore, assure ourselves that if God does not immediately stretch forth His hand against the ungodly, it is now His time of laughter; and although, in the meantime, we ought to weep, yet let us assuage the bitterness of our grief, yea, and wipe away our tears, with this reflection, that God does not connive at the wickedness of His enemies, as if from indolence or feebleness, but because for the time He would confront their insolence with quiet contempt."¹
 - i. Luke 6:22,23 "Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile [you], and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward [is] great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."
 1. "Christians can have joy in the midst of suffering not because they enjoy suffering. Believers in Jesus are not masochists—pain or humiliation is always the result of sin and thus evil and can therefore never be the cause of pleasure. Christians have joy in the midst of suffering because they suffer for the name of Jesus. Christians who suffer for the sake of Jesus share in God's mission to save the world through his son Jesus Christ, which is cause for rejoicing. And they have been promised "reward[s]" in heaven (Luke 6:22–23) if and when they suffer in faithful discipleship."²
- c. Acts 5: 33 - 42 "Gamaliel Helps the Gospel Go Forth"
 - i. Murderous Response of Sanhedrin v33
 - ii. Wise Gamaliel Intervenes: Let the apostles alone v34-39
 - iii. The Response of the Sanhedrin v40
 - iv. Response of the Apostles v41,42
 - v. Questions to know, love and obey God

II. Murderous Response of Sanhedrin v33

- a. 33 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.

¹ John Calvin and James Anderson, [*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 14.

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

- b. Furious = διαπρίω
 - i. to saw asunder or in two, to divide by a saw
 - ii. to be sawn through mentally, i.e. to be rent with vexation
 - iii. Vexed = Teased; provoked; irritated; troubled; agitated; disquieted; afflicted.
 - iv. KJV = cut to the heart; ESV = enraged; NASB = became infuriated
- c. Plotted = βουλεύω = to deliberate, consider; to take counsel, resolve
 - i. YLT = were taking counsel
 - ii. ASV = were minded
- d. What had they heard that vexed them so, that enraged them so, as if they had been cut in two? What caused them to become so furious that they talked amongst themselves and were minded to kill the apostles?
 - i. Acts 5: 29-32 "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."
 - 1. They declared the Council's actions as illegitimate.
 - 2. They declared the Council murdered the Jewish Messiah.
 - 3. They declared to the Council that the LORD GOD vindicated Jesus by raising Him from the dead, proving the Council had murdered their own Messiah.
 - 4. They declared to the Council the LORD GOD has exalted Jesus to the right hand of God as Prince and Savior.
 - 5. They declared themselves to be God's witnesses to Jesus as the unjustly murdered, resurrected, ascended and exalted Messiah.
 - 6. They declared God Himself to be witnessing to Christ as the Messiah, via His Holy Spirit.
- e. Recall the description of these tyrants from Psalm 2:
 - i. Psalm 2:1-3 "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."
 - 1. And let's recall this is the Scripture the Christians referenced in their prayer to God after they first faced persecution (Acts 4:25,26). These Jewish leaders have hardened their hearts against the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and against the Beloved Bride of Christ, and they plot again to abuse their power unto murder.

- f. “[They were filled] with malice against the apostles themselves. Since they see they cannot stop their mouths any other way than by stopping their breath, they *take counsel to slay them*, hoping that so they shall *cause the work to cease*.”³
- III. Wise Gamaliel Intervenes: Let the apostles alone v34-39
- a. 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."
- b. Gamaliel = Γαμαλιήλ = "my recompenser is God"
- i. A Pharisee and teacher of the Law
 - ii. Respected by all the people = as of great price, precious; held in honor, esteemed, especially dear
 - iii. “A Pharisee and celebrated doctor of the Law, who gave prudent advice in the Sanhedrim respecting the treatment of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 5:34–39). From Acts 22:3 it appears that he was Paul’s preceptor. He is generally and properly identified with the very celebrated Jewish doctor Gamaliel. This Gamaliel was the son of Rabbi Simeon and grandson of the celebrated Hillel; he was president of the Sanhedrim under Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius, and is reported to have died eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem.”⁴
 - iv. Tiberius (AD 14-37), Caligula (37-41), Claudius (41-54)
 - v. The events of today’s text likely occur AD 30. So, Gamaliel was likely the leader of the Sanhedrin at this time which is significant given the great influence of the Saducees amongst the Sanhedrin. Jerusalem was destroyed cAD70, so Gamaliel likely dies cAD58. Hence, he would have continued as the President of the Sanhedrin for ~28 more years after the events of today’s text. Perhaps Gamaliel is thinking back to their decision to have Christ put to death, and he is recalling the soldiers telling of the empty tomb, and now noting the miracles that accompany Christ’s apostles, Gamaliel is beginning to wonder.
 - vi. Gamaliel was also Paul’s instructor in the Law:

³ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2085.

⁴ Thomas J. Shepherd, [*The Westminster Bible Dictionary*](#) (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1880), 215.

1. Acts 22:3 Paul said, "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today."
 - a. Paul was likely born between AD5-10.
- c. "His prominence is reflected in the rabbinic comment that "when Rabban Gamaliel the elder died, the glory of the law ceased and purity and abstinence died" (*m. Sot.ah* 9:15). His reputation is reflected in the fact that he was evidently the first rabbi called Rabban ("our teacher"). Rabbinic traditions indicate that he had authority in establishing the calendar, that he had contacts with the seat of the Roman government in Syria which also controlled Jerusalem and Judea, and that he had influence in the diaspora. Gamaliel evidently decided questions regarding permissible movement on the Sabbath of witnesses who attested sightings of the sun and moon, essential for establishing details relating to the sacred calendar, a role that indicates Gamaliel's reputation and standing among the chief priests of the temple."⁵
- d. Also, Gamaliel apparently has the authority to direct the proceedings and to command for the apostles to be escorted out for the remainder of the deliberations on their fate. What are the main points made by Gamaliel?
 - i. He warns the council to "take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men."
 1. Their anger has gained the momentum, but Gamaliel calls them all to collect themselves, regain their composure and return to reason instead of irrational passions.
 - a. "It means to give attention to something. In this context, it means, "Think before you act on your emotions."⁶
 - ii. He gives two examples of self-destructive movements that were dispersed without the need for the Council to intervene. The movements of Theudas and Judas of Galilee were not of God, but of men, and their own ignorance and rash behavior got them killed and wiped out as movements.
 1. "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."
 - a. "Josephus (*Ant.* 20.5.1 §§97–98) mentions a Theudas revolting during the governorship of Fadus (AD 44–46), but this is too late to fit the timing of Gamaliel's speech, given more than a decade earlier.... Given the popularity of the name and the turmoil of the period leading to the census

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:34.

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 250.

and Judas the Galilean, mentioned in verse 37, Gamaliel may well be referring to a Theudas who was earlier than the one Josephus mentions... This Theudas would have preceded the activity of Judas during the census period. Bruce ... argues that this figure may date back to insurgencies that arose in Palestine after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, a time that Josephus also mentions as turbulent.”⁷

2. "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."
 - a. "Gamaliel's second example concerns a figure whom he places after Theudas, Judas the Galilean ... This rebel's activity appeared during the time of the census (ca. AD 6) ... followers of Judas are part of a politically zealous movement against the taxation of the census... Bruce sees Quirinius as responsible for the census but appointing officers such as Coponius to supervise it in Judea. This Judas also drew an unspecified number of followers. After his death, however, his followers scattered and his movement disappeared.”⁸
- iii. Based upon these two examples, he advises the council to “keep away from these men and let them alone”. The logic is straight forward. Why kill these men if they are on their way to self-destruction at the hands of the Romans?
 1. “Gamaliel cites these historical precedents in order to show that there were several popular movements which claimed prophetic sanction or messianic dignity, movements which attracted large numbers of followers; they quickly dissolved once the leader of the movement had been eliminated.”⁹
- iv. He lays out the two interwoven maxims underlying his advice:
 1. “for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing”
 - a. If the apostles' plan or work is of the flesh, then it will die out on its own. They need not intervene.
 2. “but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it”

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 250.

⁸ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 250.

⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:38.

- a. If the apostles' plan or work is of God, no effort of the Council can overthrow it. They intervene in vain if these men are doing God's will.
 - v. He describes the sad outcome if the Council acts wrongly:
 - 1. "lest you even be found to fight against God."
 - 2. This is a powerful argument. Gamaliel introduces uncertainty into the Council's deliberations, and then lays out the very serious consequences of wrongly mistreating the apostles.
- e. "Gamaliel suggests that history reveals whether or not a community or movement comes from God. His counsel is certainly not always a helpful principle to assess whether a movement has divine authorization. Some movements that grew out of the Christian church but must be regarded as unorthodox or outright heretical have managed to survive over long periods of time. The Roman Catholic Church regarded the Protestant church as such a movement without divine sanction, taking legal measures against evangelicals, in some places for hundreds of years. Evangelical churches regard the Church of the Latter Day Saints as a movement without authentic divine authorization, and yet the Mormons have been around since 1827, not only not dying off but growing and expanding. Still, based on Gamaliel's dictum, the existence of congregations of believers in Jesus who confess allegiance to Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Savior of the world, not only surviving two thousand years but growing in ways that were unimaginable in the Jerusalem of AD 30, is an indication that it has the stamp of God's approval. Jesus promised that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the church (Matt 16:18)."¹⁰

IV. The Response of the Sanhedrin v40

- a. 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.
- b. Gamaliel's argument arrests the furious, murderous plotting of the Council. They reign in their anger and shed their irrational scheming, agreeing with Gamaliel.
 - i. "The members of the Sanhedrin change their mind. Luke notes that the Jewish leaders find Gamaliel's counsel persuasive and abandon their plan to kill the leaders of the Jesus movement. They may have been convinced by the rabbi's reference to historical precedents that the prophetic and messianic movements of the recent past all came to nothing, or they may have been swayed by his logical argument that one should not risk to be in a position where one would fight against God. The "persuasion" does not refer to a decision about whether the movement which the apostles

¹⁰ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:17–42.

represent has a human or a divine origin. It refers to the decision not to plan the execution of these men.”¹¹

- c. The apostles are beaten.
 - i. Beaten = δέρω = to flay, skin; to beat, thrash, smite
 - ii. “They also punish them physically, beating them before releasing them. Beating (δέρω, *derō*) is mentioned in only three passages in Acts (5:39–40; 16:37; 22:19–20). The flogging looks forward to what Paul will suffer. Such flogging is regulated It is probably the “forty lashes minus one” (Deut. 25:3; 2 Cor. 11:24; Mark 13:9 is fulfilled; *m. Kil.* 8.3; *m. Mak.* 1.1; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.8.21 §238). The whipping would have been on the back and chest with a three-stranded strap of calf hide... This could leave one close to death, if not dead, from loss of blood (Marshall 1980: 124). The hope is that by intensifying the punishment, a deterrent will be established. They are wrong.”¹²
- d. The total ban against speaking in the Name of Jesus is re-emphasized.
 - i. This is always the goal of God’s enemies. As long as God’s people do not go about preaching the Gospel everywhere, calling men everywhere to repent, and turning the world upside down, God’s enemies could care less. As long as we keep our religion confined in our hearts, homes and churches, God’s enemies are pleased. The beatings are meant to bring shame upon the apostles and upon their message.
 - 1. Similar efforts are underway today.
 - a. “The rise of theocracy among conservatives: Meet the Press Reports” – Because of the widening influence of Scripture in society and politics, a national media outlet put together a hit piece meant to connect certain political candidates with that bad word “theocracy”. This journalistic “beating” is meant to shame Christians into silence. Will it work?

V. Response of the Apostles v41,42

- a. 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.
- b. After they were beaten and released, the apostles depart from the presence of the Council. The trial is over. How do the apostles respond to their severe beatings and the ban on preaching in the Name of Christ?
 - i. They rejoice they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.
 - 1. Rejoice = χαίρω to be glad; to rejoice exceedingly; to be well
 - 2. Counted worthy = καταξιόω = to account worthy, judge worthy

¹¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:39.

¹² Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 252.

3. To Suffer Shame = ἀτιμάζω = to dishonour, insult, treat with contempt
4. The apostles overflowed with sincere gladness, exceeding joy, because of the Lord’s judgment that they had been found worthy to suffer real shame and contempt in the eyes of the Council and the society.
 - a. “The apostles react to their punishment with joy. As they leave the council building and walk through the streets of Jerusalem—the marks of the beating perhaps visible—they are full of joy. The present participle “full of joy” (χαίροντες) describes not just a brief emotional reaction but a continuous sense of gladness that comes over them as they leave the Sanhedrin. As Peter’s boldness to proclaim Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and Savior in 4:8 was the result of the invasive presence of the Holy Spirit, so is the reaction of the apostles to the arrest, the night in prison, the interrogation, the beating and the ban, which they will continue to ignore.”¹³
5. But, note, their gladness for this dishonor is rooted in Christ. They can be glad and rejoice in their suffering ONLY because they are suffering the shame that flows from publicly identifying with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
 - a. “The reason for their joy is the blessing that Jesus had pronounced on his followers who are hated, excluded, reviled, and defamed on account of the Son of Man and who thus “rejoice” (χάρητε) and “leap for joy” (σκιρτήσατε) because their reward is great in heaven, “for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets” (Luke 6:22–23). The Twelve may have skipped the leaping after their beating, but they rejoice in the fact that they were treated like the prophets, indeed like Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Savior, because they remained faithful to “the Name”—to Jesus and to his cause.”¹⁴
 - ii. Unceasing daily Gospel preaching everywhere in Jerusalem
 1. All sorts of temptations will occur after a public beating and a ban from the highest court in the land. The apostles and the Church, prior to the renewed ban and the beatings, had been vigorous in their effort to obey Christ’s mission. This phrasing from Luke shows that they not only continued in their obedience, but they

¹³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:41.

¹⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:41.

also did not let up at all. They kept their foot on the gas, continuing with all their energy, in all places, at all times, in all good ways, to teach and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. They would not be silenced, and they would not slow down.

- a. “The fact that the apostles defy the Sanhedrin’s ban and continue to proclaim Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and Savior implies the “parting of the ways” of Jews and followers of Jesus—whether the latter are Jewish believers, as in Jerusalem and Judea in the year AD 30/31, or whether they are Gentile believers. As the apostles preach Jesus as Messiah in the temple, despite the ban on speaking imposed by the Jewish leaders in the highest court of the land, Luke “has answered for his readers the question concerning the leadership over Israel. Not the faithless members of the Sanhedrin but the Twelve are truly ‘ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel.’ ””¹⁵

VI. Questions to know, love and obey God

¹⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 5:42.