

# [ the apostles ]

## :: acts 5.17-32 ::

Great passage from the book of Acts this morning. Acts 5, verses 17 through 32.

Here they are:

**Acts 5.17-32 - 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, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."**

**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.**

**But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 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!" 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!"**

**Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 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. 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. 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've been enjoying these passages because even though the subject material is essentially the same, God's people being put in jail for being God's people, but in each situation there has been a clear object or thought for us to grab hold of.

In this passage we see a particular word and idea repeated and demonstrated for us, and that's the **obedience** of the apostles.

We see it in their actions and we see them talk about it in verses 29 and 32.

The apostles, of course, are examples to us. We esteem them very highly, sometimes in a way we shouldn't, but they were always quick to tell people, 'Hey, we're just like you! We just love the Lord and are serving Him.'

All of us are disciples, and while these guys had a special office given to them, their relationship with the Lord and their submission to Him is meant to be a demonstration and example for us. 'Follow me as I follow Christ' Paul said.

In this text, we see the 12 imprisoned. Peter and John had been arrested before. Tension was mounting in Jerusalem, but there hadn't been any martyrdom or widespread persecution yet. Here, the Jewish leaders, filled with jealousy and rage arrest all 12 of the apostles, the original 11 plus Matthias, and planned to hold them on trial, despite the fact that they had done nothing wrong. It was a very serious point in the beginnings of the Church.

During this situation, the Lord dispatches an angel to set them free and then sends them on a specific task to go and preach again in the Temple, sharing the message of life.

Now, despite the fact that this would almost assuredly cause more problems for them, they did it. And that is a remarkable thing because this was a dangerous deal and they had a lot to lose. They had already been imprisoned. They were already hated. They'd already been threatened. But as you read the text it's almost a small thing. They were given this directive, then went and they did it. The result was a severe beating, but as you go through these chapters you see a group of people who were absolutely filled up with God and who obeyed the Lord no matter the consequences.

Now, again, *WE* are all called to this sort of mindset. We're all called to this kind of discipleship. In the New Testament we're called to obey our governments, obey our bosses, obey the authorities God has allowed to be over us and to obey the Lord Himself. Very plainly, the Bible says that:

**1 John 5.3a - (For) This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.**

**1 John 2.4 - He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.**

John is all over this obedience stuff in his epistles.

So, the question that we should pose to ourselves this morning is: *Am I obeying the directives the Lord is giving me?*

And for me, the first things that came to mind were those disciplines of the faith that we always talk about. Read the Bible, pray, give, share my faith, those sorts of things.

But it occurs to me that some of those things aren't the kind of directives we see here. What I mean by that is prayer and spending time in God's word, sort of the BIG TWO of the Christian life, those are means by which we *know* God. That's how we *know* Him. That's how we hear from Him about the things He then wants us to do! And so, yes, absolutely, devotion to God's word and to prayer is essential and commanded and foundational. But we need to understand that those 2 disciplines are what reveal to us the commands of God. We can't get into a sort of

mindset where the reading and the praying are, by themselves, the final acts of obedience. Instead, we need to take *what* God has revealed to us in His word and by His Spirit and *apply* those things.

Because, like the apostles, we too have been set free. In fact, that's an analogy that the Bible uses to discuss salvation. That we've been set **free** but then set **forth** on a road with Christ that leads ultimately to reward and glorification in heaven.

No one is set free to just exist and live isolated away from the rest of the world reading the Bible but not living it out. In fact, Jesus said specifically that He wants us to be **in** the world. We're not be of the world, living like those outside of salvation, but we are absolutely sent to the people of the world, to carry the message of life.

God released the apostles in Acts chapter 5 with a purpose. He sent them back to the people that were threatening their lives. And we get excited about that when we read it.

But then we need to look inward and remember that we have not been set free to live without purpose. We're not set free by God so that we can withdraw away from the world and live out life without any friction or any risk or any sacrifice. We *never* see that depicted in the Bible.

Sometimes I think that I get into more of an Abraham mode. You know? Things were different back in that period of the Old Testament. There was no permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There was no Bible. Some of these guys didn't even know God's name. Every ten years or so God would appear to them and ask them to do something.

But that's not what Christianity is during this era of grace and the Church. Now we have a full revelation of God and His plan and the future. And now we have countless thousands around us who need salvation, countless thousands of opportunities to carry out what God has called us to do. We can't allow ourselves to be set free and then to go silently into a world withdrawn from all that's around us.

The word used for 'obey' in this passage of Acts can be translated this way: *To submit to authority, or by analogy, to conform to advice.*

Our lives are meant to be subject to the authority of God. That means more than just knowing things about Him. Christianity has to go beyond just reading God's Word. We must then *conform* ourselves to that Word. We must conform our lives and our lifestyles and our decisions to the authority of God's Holy Spirit and the 'advice,' as it were, the commandments of the Scriptures.

And what we're commanded to do in Scripture isn't always easy and it doesn't always make sense. Just like going back to the Temple to preach was for these guys. It had serious implications.

Forgive those who wrong you.

Give sacrificially.

Make disciples.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Take up your cross.

These are things that don't make sense to the natural way of thinking. And they're not easy to do. In fact they're impossible to do outside of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Yet, we're commanded to do these things. So the question is, are we doing them? Are we just reading *about* them and then going on our way un-obedient, or are we being obedient and following the directives given to us by God?

Sometimes things get worse before they get better. It did for the apostles. They were beaten after obeying Christ. But they understood the power of God and how significant the Christian life is. And because of that, they were bold, they were filled up, they were unstoppable.

Something that jumped out at me in this text was verse 24. Let's read it again:

**Acts 5.24 - Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.**

I hope that in our own lives there is a wonder of what God might do. If there's no expectation or excitement in our lives, then I'm confident that we're not following where He's leading.

Like these apostles, we're each going to be called to specific tasks and ministries. Some of those things are going to be more public, some will be more private. You may be a Peter, you may be a Bartholomew. That's up to the Lord.

But if there's nothing going on in our lives that we need to be obeying, if we're not receiving directives from the Lord about things He wants us to do right now, then we've got to get moving. We've got to get into Biblical Christianity which takes the Word of God and actually applies it to daily living.

We won't be called to this sort of dynamic situation every day, but God did not set us free to do nothing. He didn't set us free so that we could just exist and lay around, learning things about God but never doing anything about it while people around us enter into a Christless eternity.

You are free and free indeed. Now it's time for us to go, stand and speak all the words of this life that has been given to us. And may the work that God does in and through our hearts and lives be wonderful.