

**WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN****Acts 5:12-42**

**Intro:** Can the church (and all of us) be stopped? Can anything stop the church from its mission?

This past week we watched events in Afghanistan unfold as the Taliban very quickly took over that country. They had been swiftly vanquished 20 years ago by U.S. troops and when those U.S. troops pulled out in increasing numbers over the past month, the radical Muslims seemingly returned just as quickly as they had left in 2001.

News reports showed terrified Afghans storming airports in an attempt to flee the hardline rule of the Taliban. If it is difficult to imagine fearing people of your own religion as Muslims were running from Muslims, just try to wrap your mind around what it is like for people of other religions in a country where it's illegal to convert to another religion.

Here in the USA where we enjoy religious freedom that Afghans cannot even comprehend, it is difficult to think how it is for Christians there. Lori posted a piece for the Gospel Coalition on the ABC Facebook group's page the other day that gives us just a glimpse. Listen as I read and excerpt from the beginning of the article:

*"In early July, Afghan pastors and church leaders made a difficult decision. They decided to formally register their faith with the Afghan government. What an absurdity to register as Christians in an Islamic republic that prohibits a person from converting to Christianity! Against the advice of many, these Afghan church leaders felt compelled, for the sake of future generations, to legally declare their true faith in Christ.*

*"What about our children and our grandchildren?" they said. "Someone should make this sacrifice so the next generations can openly call themselves followers of Jesus." They registered with the government, and we all prayed from outside, asking God to protect them from being rounded up and imprisoned the next morning. They were interviewed but not arrested.*

*This past weekend, we met in an Afghan/English church retreat. On the first night of the retreat, we learned that a pastor in Afghanistan received a letter from the Taliban: "We know who you are, what you do, and where to find you." By Saturday the Taliban were at his door, but he had gone into hiding. Praise God."*

The Church will not be stopped. Christians may be stopped. They can be arrested, tortured, and even executed, and in that way they are stopped, but their faith will not be stopped, because what is of God is unstoppable and because of that the Church will never be vanquished. Long after Islam and any other belief system is a distant memory, the Church will live on because it is God's plan for humanity.

Over the past couple weeks and finishing out today, we have been looking at being Overcomers in an overwhelming age. Those news reports were perfect example of overwhelming. I mean what is more terrible than that?

Well, what the early Church was facing in Acts was very similar. And they were ready for it. The apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, were unflappable in the face of warnings by authorities, beatings, imprisonment, and threats of death. No matter what the obstacle, nothing would stop them from their mission of making disciples. This is because they firmly believed their own words in reply to the threats from those authorities: WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN. Let's read our text learn how we must apply it as well. It's long, but it's powerful.

**(Read Acts 5:12-42)**

Are we as unstoppable as these apostles? The answer is Yes and No. If we throw up our hands and give up, we are not unstoppable. But if we are like those Afghan Christians last month, who in the face of a knock on their door or even the loss of their head registered as Followers of Jesus Christ. The latter is what we are called to.

Let's take a quick look at our passage.

**Obeying God rather than men results in signs and wonders**

- Humanly speaking we can do nothing. By the power of the Holy Spirit we can do all things. It's not in our power to do powerful things, but it is in Jesus Christ. *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* Philippians 4:13 is not just idle talk.
- Here in Acts 5 we see signs and wonders and healings and powerful experiences that are happening by the hand of these formerly fearful disciples now called apostles. All the while as miracles are happening, the

Good News is going out, and as it does the number of people becoming Christ Follower keeps growing as the word spreads all across the region.

- More on the Good News in a bit. First let's look at how . . .

### **When you obey God rather than men, it will be met with resistance**

- Verse 17 says that the high priest and his associates “rose up”. These followers of Jesus of Nazareth were like recurring nightmare. They thought they got rid of Jesus, but they obviously hadn't. They thought they told his followers to cease and desist, but they didn't. Now they were ticked! These Galilean fishermen were getting all the attention! These disciples of Jesus were winning over converts and that meant the powerbase was eroding.
- The truth is, as our text points out, **THEY WERE JEALOUS!** Even petty emotions like jealousy can cause huge issues. The religious leaders, led by the Sadducees, who were in it for the power and not for the glory of God were filled with jealousy. And for that reason, they threw the apostles into prison.
- But . . .

### **When you obey God rather than men, God will make a way where there seems to be no way**

- Verse 19 says an angel of the Lord releases the apostles. And whereas in chapter 3 and 4 the apostles only refers to Peter and John, this text strongly implies that it was ALL the apostles were locked up. And the angel facilitated the original GREAT ESCAPE.
- But the apostles don't go into hiding, they go back to teaching – **IN THE TEMPLE COURTS!** Notice the angel says, "*Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.*" (v. 20). So they're at the temple at daybreak, **PREACHING!** A sunrise service and it's not even Easter! They began the night in jail, they ended the night **PREACHING!** God will make a way where there seems to be no way.
- It's almost comedic, the high priests come into hold a trial and send away for the apostles and they're not in the prison. In fact they're preaching in the temple again. I think it's interesting that it says that the captain of the temple guard brings them, but not by force. They knew that there was something extraordinary about these men. And they were. Last week we talked about the obvious fact that these men had been with Jesus. Once again this is an example of it: because they have been with Jesus, they are handled differently. They are seen as extraordinary.
- The high priest questions them: *We strictly charged you not to teach in this name yet you filled Jerusalem with your teaching.* v. 28 “*What were you doing? We thought we made this clear!*”
- Peter's response was, “*You did make it clear, but we must obey God rather than men. And he told us to ‘Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life.’*”
- This is New Life. You see . . .

### **When you obey God rather than men, they will discover the Gospel is more than a religion**

- Now about that Good News: The angel told them escapees to preach all the words of this life. The religious leaders of the Sanhedrin espoused a system in which any spiritual application had long since worn off, but that didn't matter as long as it kept them in power. The Gospel, which is quite literally the Good News on the other hand is words of life. Timothy Lopez points out that the Gospel conveys not just a new moral code, not just a new explanation of things, but life! The old song joyously says, *Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life!* because the Good News is just that **GOOD.**
- And the powerful thing about the Good News is that it stands the test of time. The wise rabbi, Gamaliel, Paul's mentor, as a matter of fact, unwittingly points this out. He saw that these apostles were going to obey God rather than some earthly leaders and killing them would not silence them. He wisely points out that if their message is truly from God there is no power that stand up to it. And he was right. For two thousand years the enemy has tried to stifle the advance of the Good News and it has thrived. In just that past 75 years an atheistic regime tried to stamp out Christianity in China, but to no avail. The few million Christians in China in 1949 are now tens of millions of Christians in 2021. In 1979 a radical Islamic regime came into power in Iran. Forty years later the church is thriving there. The Good News cannot be stopped because of courageous Followers of Jesus Christ answer threats with, “*Whether it is right in the sight of*

*God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Act 4:19-20 and “We must obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29.*

**Conclusion:** Oh, to be such men and women of God! Oh, to know that the outcome of registering as a Christian may very likely be pain, heartache and death, and still do it for the benefit of future generations. Oh, to be so convinced of the wonderful words of life that, even after having my skin flayed with a cruel whip I would be like these apostles who . . . *left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. v. 42. And to keep preaching as well!*

Let me just close with this invitation from F.B. Meyer: *“The Angel of the Lord comes to open prison doors. Are you in sore trouble from which there is no apparent deliverance? Are you in prison in the dungeon of self-doubt and despair? Are you being heavily persecuted? Oh, wrap around you the divine protection! Dare to believe that the doors will open as by unseen hands. Nothing can stay the purposes of God. Only use your God-given Liberty to go forth to teach the people. The Gospel is a message to the people. Let us preach to the hungry, needy, and crowds. Philosophers, scientists, the wise and the prudent of our age may mock, but the people know the Gospel when they hear it. Let us give it to them.”*

Yes! Let’s give them the Gospel ABC! Let’s obey God rather than men! Amen.