

Acts 5:12-42

Bravely Facing Opposition

Introduction:

I want to briefly outline this chapter

Chapter outline:

The Apostles are preaching Jesus

The Apostles are arrested

The Apostles are freed by an Angel

The Apostles are rearrested

The Apostles are put on trial and threatened

The Apostles are bold, unafraid, proclaim what God has accomplished through Jesus, blame the Religious leaders for the death of God's messiah and then offer salvation to their persecutors

The Religious leaders are irate and want to kill them but are talked out of it by the Wise Gamaliel

The Apostles are threatened again, beaten, and released

The Apostles rejoice to suffer dishonor for the Name ...And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

We can see through Luke's account that persecution is growing for the Church. In the not so distant future (Chapter 7-12) a heavy persecution will break out - Stephen the deacon will be murdered, the Jerusalem church will scatter to all the surrounding region fleeing persecution, James (the brother of John) will be beheaded, and Peter will be arrested. Yet, as we know, the Good News of God's salvation through Jesus marches on!

The Bible promises followers of Jesus, trials, tribulations and persecutions. One doesn't even have to confine persecution to the experience of the NT Church. Persecution of Christians is still very much alive in the world today. Jesus himself said, **"A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."** Now of course this isn't one of those Bible promises that you tend to hope on or get tattooed somewhere on your body, or write encouraging cards about - Yet as we will see these persecutions do the opposite of what we expect in the life of the

Church... The Church grows in strength, and numbers all the more, in fact, it thrives under persecution.

There is a large irony of the Christian faith and movement -God and his followers win by losing, “by letting their opponents win and then transforming the expectant result.” The suffering and even death of disciples, like that of their master, doesn’t lead to the squelching of the Jesus movement, it leads to its success and expansion.

Tertullian (an early church theologian and historian) wrote to the Roman governor of his province, refuting various false charges being made against Christians and the Christian faith, arguing that the followers of Christ were loyal subjects of the empire, and thus, should not be persecuted. At any rate, Tertullian observes, the persecution was failing to destroy Christianity.

He writes, “kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust; your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. Therefore God allows that we thus suffer. When you recently condemned a Christian woman to the leno (pimp, i.e. accused her of being a prostitute) rather than to the leo (lion), you made confession that a taint on our purity is considered among us something more terrible than any punishment and any death. Nor does your cruelty, however exquisite, avail you; it is rather a temptation to us. The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”

It is a fact of history that the early Church thrived under persecution, were brave in the face of death, and were a radical counter-culture and blessing to their persecutors. If we are promised persecution as followers of Jesus then we should want to know how the church thrived and was brave under persecution.

1. Why do Persecutions come?

1. As we’ve been seeing throughout the book of Acts persecutions come not because of Christians trying to overthrow government and establish god’s kingdom by force but simply because God’s kingdom is a threat to every culture and kingdom. Christians are to be peacemakers, those who bring reconciliation and forgiveness, harmony. Historically speaking Christians have been pacifist when it comes to issues of war and violence. But Christianity has always

both defied and resonated with the cultures it has found itself in and often this quiet defiance, this peaceful protest is seen as a major threat.

2. **Examples:** early Christians forbade both abortion and the practice of “infant exposure,” in which unwanted babies were simply thrown out. Christians were also a sexual counterculture in that they abstained from any sex outside of heterosexual marriage. This was in the midst of a society that thought that, especially for married men, sex with prostitutes, slaves, and children was perfectly fine.
 3. Yet Christians were also unusually generous with their money, particularly to the poor and needy, and not just to their own family and racial group. Another striking difference was that Christian communities were multi-ethnic, since their common identity in Christ was more fundamental than their racial identities and therefore created a multi-ethnic diversity, which was unprecedented for a religion. Finally, Christians believed in non-retaliation, in forgiving their enemies, even those who were killing them.
 4. One reason was that Christians *were* ridiculed as too exclusive and different. And yet many were drawn to Christianity *because it was different*. If a religion isn’t different from the surrounding culture—if it doesn’t critique and offer an alternative to it—it dies because it’s seen as unnecessary. If Christians today were also famous for and marked by chastity, generosity and justice, multi-ethnicity, and peacemaking—would it not be compelling to many?
 5. There are many reasons why persecutions come - but I would say it is usually connected to people’s way of living and thinking (especially those in power) being challenged and threatened. At the end of the day persecutions come because when “the powers that be” have nothing to threaten or that they can ultimately take away from the church - they are enraged! This is what happened to Richard Wurmbrand - The Communist regime of Romania could not break his spirit because his hope was hidden in Christ and this enraged them all the more!
- 2. How and why did the Church thrive under Persecution?**
1. As we’ve been saying throughout our teachings through the book of Acts - The fact of the Resurrection of Jesus changed everything for the early church.

1. **Jesus Presence was with them by the power of the Holy Spirit.** - The absolute presence of Jesus with us wherever we go, even through death. He'll never leave us or forsake us!!
2. **Jesus Power was at work through his Church to move all things towards his Kingdom** - God sovereignly uses everything in our lives, good and bad, for his glory and our good. Which means that we don't have to fear anything because God is in control of all things. A theme again that we'll see throughout the book of Acts - the Kingdom of God is an unstoppable force, nothing can stop it, not the wicked political schemes of Herod or the Jewish leaders, not the beheading of the Apostles, not the prejudice and racism of the Judaizers, not the lynching mobs, not imprisonment, not shipwreck or vipers, or stoning.. nothing can stop the promises of God, in Jesus, from getting out to the world he so dearly loves!
3. **Jesus Persuasion** - Of course Jesus didn't just rise from the dead, he ascended to the right hand of God. The ascension means that Jesus is 24/7 in the presence of God, the righteous judge, (The cosmic court room) pleading our case -that we are guiltless of sin, and that we are clothed in Christ righteousness. Jesus work on the cross, means, that those who believe in him, their debt of sin has been paid in full, and the righteous life that Jesus lived has been credited to their account. God now sees you as absolutely spotless and beautiful in Jesus.
2. If the resurrection is true it means that the best is yet to come. It means that "everything sad will come untrue", all brokenness, sin, death, every injustice, every wicked government will be wiped away and all that is good and right and true in the world will be magnified times a trillion.
3. If we believe that the resurrection really happened, then Jesus Christ has made the ideal a future reality. The downtrodden can now say, "I now have something. I have a hope. I have a hope for the future." That's something that all people can be joyful about not just the rich and affluent.
4. "The resurrection, not taken as a symbol but believed on as a concrete fact, will lift up the downtrodden, and will change the world. Belief in a final judgment gives us enough hope so that we will

neither resort to violence to bring in justice nor give in and collaborate with injustice” -Miroslav Volf

1. And that’s exactly what it did. The early Church faced persecution bravely because they had an unshakeable Hope in the Resurrection - because the resurrection of Jesus Christ was a living reality.

3. How did the Church and the Apostles face these persecutions with bravery and joy?

1. If you haven’t caught on already the answer is Jesus.
2. Look at What Peter says to the Sanhedrin when they are on trial.
3. **“But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” Acts 5:29-32**
 1. Peter calls Jesus the Leader and Savior, who gives repentance and forgiveness to Israel.
 2. The word “Leader” is the word Archegos (only used 4 times in the NT all in reference to Jesus (It is literally, arch-ego) in Greek and it is commonly translated as Champion. Studies show that the roman-greco world was a champion or hero culture -meaning that instead of sending their children to therapy for self esteem they told them stories of great hero’s who had fought and defeated terrible enemies. Archegos was actually a term commonly used for Hercules. So was Jesus a hero, a champion? Absolutely - Jesus engaged in mortal combat with death and sin and triumphed for the salvation of his people! He was the ultimate champion and the early Church constantly thought of him and raised him up as their ultimate inspiration, and champion.
 3. Two other passages where Jesus is called the Archegos are found in Hebrews. **“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist,**

in bringing many sons to glory, should make the Champion (Archegos) of their salvation perfect through suffering. - Hebrews 2:9-10

4. **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the Champion (Archegos) and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” - Hebrews 12:1-2**

5. What do we see through these verses? Our champion Jesus suffered greatly - How did he do it? By looking through to the Joy set before him - the accomplishment of bringing many sons to glory!! He looked to that Joy! The Captain or Champion of our salvation looked past all the pain suffering and shame of the cross to the joy!
6. Ok this is amazing they bravery that they show - these guys not many months before lynched Jesus and had him crucified and here the Apostles are Boldly proclaiming Jesus as Champion and savior - but here is another amazing thing - They are offering repentance and forgiveness of sins to the very people that are hell bent on stopping them, killing them, the very ones who put the Messiah to death! If that is not the way of Jesus, then I don't know what is. Jesus was the one as he was being crucified said, Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.”

1. Which leads into my next point..

4. How can we?

1. We can only have this kind of bravery, a bravery that doesn't turn on it's enemies and add to the sin and evil of the world, we can only have that kind of bravery through Jesus, through receiving him as savior and champion, as our salvation and the forgiver of our sins, by receiving his Holy Spirit into our lives, by holding him up as our example, by having his Spirit make his way alive in our hearts, By being filled up with his love and his approval...This is how we can have that bravery to it is by as the writer of Hebrews says, We can run our race by... **“Looking unto Jesus the champion and**

perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross..."

2. What is the joy that we look to?

1. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. - 1 Peter 1:3-5

1. If what we have can actually be threatened then we have something to fear - this is why we cannot do what society tells us to do for inspiration or bravery - we cannot look within, we cannot just push out the bad - because some of us just aren't strong or brave enough and for most of us bad things are going to happen - but the scripture says that our hope is in heaven - for a new Heaven and earth where righteousness dwells, our hope is a kingdom who's builder and maker is Christ, Our hope is being guarded by God - it is imperishable, undefiled, unfading - truly, nothing can affect it for good or bad, nothing can touch it. We have a living hope.. hope for today that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.. look to that hope, look to that joy that is set before every follower of Jesus! we are going to see the face of God and we will be with him forever and every in eternal bliss!
2. Jonathan Edwards used to encourage his congregation's joy in Christ with these three things:
 1. Our "bad things" will work out for good. (Romans 8:28)
 2. Our "Good things" - adoption into God's family, Justification in God's sight, union with him - can never be taken away. (Romans 8:1)
 3. Our best things - life in heaven, new heavens and the new earth, resurrection - are yet to come. (Revelation 22:1)

Conclusion: Maybe your saying this morning - I'm just not there. But I think the need for bravery in our culture is much more present than we might think.. you need to be brave and honest with your closest friends and

family so that you can actually be a blessing and help to them and not just enable them or ruin their lives - your friends need your bravery so they can hear the truth. That Kind of humility and confidence is only available through the Love of Jesus filling you up. But committing to this I think it's an issue of knowing where our allegiance lies.. who is really champion and savior...Remember in the beginning of the book of Acts the disciples ask - Lord will you restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?? The disciples were still solely concerned with their own prosperity and their own tribe - Jesus will of course expand their vision with the coming of the Holy Spirit. after that they no longer focus on the kingdom of Israel, (their own prosperity and tribe) but now they focus on the kingdom of God..is our hope in this life in our own little kingdoms, in the status quo, or the American dream, in stuff, approval of others or society, financial prosperity and affluence, or is our hope in Jesus in all that he is and has done and in his kingdom? (the scary thing about putting your hope in those things is that you will ultimately lose them (we will all face death ALONE) and they can also be lost in a moment.. for example think about the financial crisis of 2008.) Do we believe that nothing in this life matters if Christ did not come live, die and rise the third day.. do we believe that our ultimate hope is not that this world will get better or that we will obtain all our hopes and dreams but that the Lord will come from heaven and transform our lowly bodies that they might be like his glorious body???