

The people of the early church met in the temple in Solomon's colonnade, where they listened to the Apostle's teachings and worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ. During this time, the disciples performed many great miracles, and people from all over the region brought the sick, and demon possessed, to be healed. The Apostles, and all of the followers of Christ, were held in great esteem by everyone who saw or heard what God was doing, everyone that is except the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

The High Priest, and the party of the Sadducees in particular, were filled with jealousy. They had already warned Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus, but the disciples paid no attention to their command. What if others followed their example? The Apostles were getting all of the attention. People were turning in mass to faith in Jesus Christ. If they did not do something about this movement, they might lose their position, power, and authority among the people. This Jesus thing might severely affect their income as people saw less of a need for the trappings of temple worship. On top of all of this, the Apostles blamed the religious leaders for killing the man that everyone was turning to in faith.

In an attempt to stop the Apostles, the religious leaders had them thrown into jail, until they could put them on trial, and punish them for their disobedience. During the night, an angel of the Lord opened the door, led them past the guards, set them free, and instructed the Apostles to go back to the temple courts to proclaim the full message of the gospel and the new life that is available through faith in Jesus Christ. Putting all the threats aside, the disciples did as the Lord commanded.

Our passage this evening is filled with irony as the events of that day unfolded. There is much to be learned by the church today as we observe how God uses His people when they take a bold stand for Christ. Please read along with me, Acts 5:21b-32.

The bible says that when the High Priest and his entourage arrived, they called an emergency meeting of the ruling counsel of Judah. This would be the equivalent today of calling an emergency joint session of congress. The Sanhedrin Council consisted of the High Priest and 70 other members made up from the leaders among the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Politically, and spiritually, this group was the most powerful among the people. They had only one goal set by their agenda. Silence the Apostles, once for all, in order to stop the people from turning to Jesus.

Isn't it ironic, that the religious leaders were doing everything they could to stop the movement of God among the people. Perhaps it was due to their lack of faith, or maybe it was because of their own self-centered interests. The gospel threatened the status quo. The spread of the gospel endangered the flow of money coming in to the leaders of the temple. Thousands of people were meeting in Solomon's colonnade, when they might otherwise be supporting the Synagogues, or making sacrifices, and giving offerings, at the temple.

It is not that different today, when the Pope can speak to the world without even mentioning Jesus, or when pastor's, and other religious leaders, refuse to stand upon the clear principles of God's word. How different are the religious systems of the world today when church leaders are more concerned about political correctness, and not offending anyone with the clear gospel message: don't speak out against abortion, don't speak out against political corruption, don't speak out against homosexuality, same-sex marriage, or adultery. In reality pastors who say or think such things teach their congregations to not stand upon the clear principles of God's word, and they oppose what God would do among His people.

The High priest sent the Apostles to jail and called an emergency session of the Sanhedrin. He planned to squash them once for all. But, when the religious leaders sent for the Apostles, they were not in their cells. How ironic, that the guards stood watch, throughout the night, over empty cells.

It is obvious to most Christians that our faith is constantly under attack. The government tries to imprison us with political correctness, and illegal laws imposed by judicial overreach. The news media, which is largely controlled by non-believers, slants much of what they report in an attempt to paint Christians as ignorant, uninformed, and out of step with reality. Much of what the world declares, as science, would better be defined as ignorance, and bias. The spiritual forces of evil use all of these methods, and more, to try to keep Christians locked up in a spiritual cell, so that we cannot be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples, then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." There is freedom in Christ when the believer is willing to stand upon the truth. There is nothing that this world can throw at us that will take away the smallest part of what is true. We have the full truth preserved for us in the word of God. If we stand upon this truth, in the face of all opposition, God will deliver us, and bless us for our stand. If by our stand the world demands our lives, God will give us His grace to face death with dignity and confidence, and He will reward us in the life to come. We must not be taken captive; we must take our stand, if we want to be free.

Another irony in this passage is that the most powerful people in the country met to judge prisoners that they did not have in their custody. The morning after the arrest, the religious leaders were sure they had the Apostles right where they wanted them. They would stop the spread of the gospel, and discredit the men who were determined to spread its message. They were confident, smug, and filled with vengeance, but they did not have the Apostles as they imagined.

Today, those who lack faith use such arguments as the evolution and the big bang theory to take away the need for God in creation, but the bible says they are without excuse, for what can be known about God can be clearly seen in His creation. They think they have us, right where they want us, with arguments surrounding a woman's right to choose, or gay marriage, but sin is sin, and truth is truth, and all of their carefully crafted arguments fail in the light of God's word. They don't have us in custody at all, if we stand upon God's word.

In verse 23 we read that the men sent to retrieve the Apostles reported that they found the cells locked, with the guards standing outside, but the men were gone. This puzzled the Chief Priests, and left them wondering what would come of this. Ironically, while they were wondering how they got away, the Apostles were out in temple courts, openly sharing Jesus. When people challenge our faith, we need to remember that we serve a sovereign God who is able to watch over us, deliver us, and use us to His glory. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is able to go before us, even in the greatest of opposition, so long as we are willing to take our stand and speak the truth. The question we have to contemplate is, will Jesus really stand for us, if we will not stand for Him? Our attitude should be that I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

While the religious leaders were trying to figure out what happened, someone reported that the Apostles were out in the temple courts preaching the gospel. They were utterly defiant of the High Priest's orders. They were boldly doing what the religious leaders demanded that they stop once for all. This wasn't at all what they expected; they were completely caught off guard, so they sent the temple guards to arrest the Apostles again.

I imagine the guards were already a little nervous about what might happen to them, since they would be held responsible for allowing the Apostles to escape in the first place. When they reached the temple courts, they could not be as bold as they wanted, because they were outnumbered and feared that the people would stone them. The Apostles were protected by the unity of the people.

This reminds us of an important principle. Not only must we be willing to take our stand, we must also be willing to stand together. No unworthy public official could be elected, or stay in office, if all of the Christians in our nation stood together. If everyone who claims to be Christian would stand upon the clear principles of God's word, and we stood together, we could overturn *Row v. Wade*. Marriage would be defined as being between a man and a woman. Evolution would be taught as an old theory and creation taught as fact. Laws would be enforced, or changed whenever they promoted godlessness. Unfortunately, instead of the word of God, many who attend church have their heads filled with mush, and are unwilling to take a stand on the truth of God's word, but we, in this body of believers, can choose to stand together. We can join with like-minded congregations and make a difference, with God's help, if we are willing.

The guards brought the Apostles into the Sanhedrin Council to hear the charges against them. They had defied orders not to speak in Jesus name, and they were saying that the religious leaders were responsible for Jesus' death. The Apostles' reaction was to say guilty as charged, but we must obey God rather than men.

The general principle of God's word is that we must obey the civil authorities, unless it is sin to do so. It is sin to cower to the authorities that try to undermine the gospel and the truth of God's word. It is a sin to not try to reach the lost world with the good news of Jesus Christ. Sin, at its worst, is direct disobedience to God's revealed will. God's will is to use us as His instruments to build His kingdom on earth, until the Lord's return.

The most powerful men in Jerusalem brought the Apostles into their chambers, and through intimidation, tried to destroy them, and their testimonies. What did Peter and the others do? They went toe to toe with the authorities. They did not back down. They took their stand, and repeated everything that they had said that got them into trouble in the first place.

"The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

You accuse us of teaching in Jesus name? We must obey God rather than men. You said that we are trying to make you guilty of Jesus' blood. You are guilty, because you plotted to have the Son of God, your Messiah, crucified on a Roman cross. But for all your evil designs, God used your sin for good. What you intended for selfishness, and evil, God took the event of Jesus's death and used it as the only acceptable sacrifice for sin. God raised Jesus from the dead, and exalted Him to the right hand of God the Father and proclaimed Jesus to be Prince and Savior, so that through repentance and faith, Israel, and the whole world, might be saved. You can't deny these things, because we have seen the movement of God with our own eyes. Through faith in Jesus Christ, God has placed His Holy Spirit in all who believe. The power of the Holy Spirit is manifest in those who obey God, and that is why you are also witnesses to the miraculous things that God is doing. That is why you cannot keep us confined in your jails. This is why you cannot stop the gospel message. As long as there are Christians who are willing to stand together on the truth of God's word, and are not afraid to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is nothing in the world that can stop us.

If we are in the last days, time is running out. Time is running out for those who have not bowed their knees in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is running out for born again believers to make a difference in this lost world. If there is anyone here who has not settled in your heart that Jesus is the Lord of your life, why not pray right now. Confess and repent of your sins to God. Choose right now to believe in Jesus and His sacrifice for your sins. Ask Him to come into your heart as Savior and Lord over your life, then join the rest of us in our stand for Jesus and the word of God, while there is still time.