



A Divine Rescue! Acts 5:17-42 (Lesson #9)

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OUTLINE of Acts Chapter 5:17-42

- 1) The High Priest and other Sadducees, filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and placed them in prison (5:17-18).
- 2) During the night an angel of the Lord opens the prison and commands them to go back to the temple and preach (5:19-20).
- 3) The apostles obeyed the angel and early the next morning they entered the temple complex and began preaching (5:21).
- 4) The Sanhedrin also met that morning and sent for the apostles to be bought from the jail (5:21).
- 5) The officers arrived at the jail, and although it was locked up the apostles were gone, so they went back and reported to the Sanhedrin (5:22-23).
- 6) Many in the Sanhedrin were perplexed by the news (5:24).
- 7) The Sanhedrin learn that the apostles are back on the temple mount preaching Jesus (5:25).
- 8) The Captain of the Temple and other officers went and brought the apostles to the Sanhedrin without incident (5:26-27).
- 9) The High Priest reviewed the command he had previously given to Peter and John and then leveled two additional charges against the apostles (5:28).
- 10) Peter first told the Sanhedrin what he had told them before, we must obey God rather than man (5:29).
- 11) He then made four clear declarations about the Messiah (5:30).
- 12) And claimed that they along with the Holy Spirit were witnesses (5:32).
- 13) This initially enraged many on the Council and they wanted to kill the apostles (5:33).
- 14) Gamaliel rose up, put the apostles out of the room and calmed the remaining members of the Sanhedrin (3:34-37).
- 15) Next Gamaliel gave advice on what they should do with the apostles (5:38-39).
- 16) The Sanhedrin called the apostles back in, beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus.
- 17) The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus and kept preaching that Jesus was the Messiah (5:41-42).

5:17 ¶ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

17-18 - But, the High Priest (**Caiaphas**), had seen enough, those who were with him (others members of the Sanhedrin who were Sadducees) have seen enough!

So, the second persecution is instigated (once again) principally by the Sadducees under the leadership of the High Priest Caiaphas, who is himself a Sadducee.

This group, we are told, are **filled with jealousy**. They were **filled with indignation**; they were filled with **contentious rivalry**.

They are seeing the apostles on the temple mount, they are teaching, thousands are healed, multitudes are being saved.

They are filled with jealousy! We have talked about this Greek word, and it highlights the emotional control of their jealousy!

The apostles are continuing to declare Jesus, that He rose from the grave and the **High Priest along with other Sadducees'** have had enough!

This group of Sadducees arrests, what appears to be the entire group of the apostles. **All twelve.**

Scholars are divided if this is the **same place on the temple mount**, where Peter and John were locked up or a different "common or public" prison. The control that the Sanhedrin have over it would lead me to believe it is in the **temple complex**. But we cannot be sure.

Vs 19-20 - Here we find a **divine rescue**. Orchestrated by God, executed by an "*angel of the Lord.*"

Arrested that day, but during that evening God sent an angel who opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out.

Now you will see this in a moment, but **they were under guard**, we are not exactly sure what this looked like, other than it appears to be **another miracle** in a long line of miracles and the guards outside the door do not even recognize that the apostles have been led out of the prison.

So you know, we will see a few other angelic interventions in the book of Acts including (8:26; 12:7-10; and 12:23).

The angel of the Lord, then gives a command to the apostles:

- 1) Go and **stand in the temple**.
 - a. The Greek word for stand means to stand with boldness.
 - b. Go stand in a very public place (temple mount).
 - c. Go stand, where they had previously been arrested.

- 2) **Speak to the people** (present tense imperative) about the **words of this life**.

Fruchtenbaum writes that the phrase "**words of life**" was a Hebraism meaning the **resurrection life**. If that is true, the angel is commanding them to proclaim one of the things that has put them in the crosshairs with the Sadducees.

Points of Observation: Is this descriptive or prescriptive? From this event, did the apostles conclude that they had nothing to fear because God would always get them out of it?

OK, back to the story. Then do you know what the apostles did? Yea, we will read it next, and they did so without hesitation! I desire to be always instantly obedient when God calls me. How about you?

Tell them about the **resurrected life** that is found in Jesus! **Go back to the place where you were locked up and keep doing what you were doing.**

21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside."

Vs 21a - So they show up first thing in the morning, in what is probably the most public place in Jerusalem and they begin to preach! They were given a command by an angel of the Lord.

So, the next morning at daybreak, as soon as the sun was up, they (the apostles) entered the temple complex and begin to preach, begin to declare the message of resurrection life available in the Messiah.

OK, we are going to leave the apostles for a second, so Luke can tell us what is happening with the Sanhedrin.

Vs 21b - Meanwhile, the High Priest and those who were with him arrived **at the temple complex**.

The High Priest called for the assembling of the council (the Sanhedrin), which included the leading religious and political body of Israel. The total of this group, counting the High Priest, was 71.

Having assembled, under the leadership of the High Priest, they sent word (by messengers) to the prison to have the apostles brought to them for interrogation.

You can imagine they have had enough of these **insubordinate fishermen from Galilee**.

You will see this clearly when we get to the charges made by the High Priest, but I do not want to get ahead of my skis.

Vs 22-23 - The officers they dispatched **arrived at the prison**. But they **did not find the apostles**.

The apostles were gone, so they headed back to the temple complex carrying disturbing news!

Upon their arrival the officers give a **report to the Sanhedrin**: We arrived this morning at the prison, we found the prison securely locked! There were guards posted outside the door of the cell, but when we opened the cell we found no one inside.

You can imagine they asked the guards present what they knew, which by the way was nothing, and they made the return trip to Jerusalem, unsure of what to make of all this!

24 *Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25* *And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."*

Vs 24 - Other versions include, the High Priest, the Captain of the Temple, and the chief priests heard this story from the officers they had dispatched, they were **greatly perplexed**, they were **dumbfounded** and at a **complete loss** and they begin to wonder **what this would come to**.

No doubt they wondered when will the next shoe drop and what will that shoe be?

Vs 25 - Then word came from the temple complex, word came from someone who was on the temple mount.

The word: **"Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people."**

Can you imagine what is going through the High Priest's mind. We have told these men plainly and clearly to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. We locked them up and hear they are again, preaching and teaching Jesus!

26 ¶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Vs 26 - Then the Captain of the Temple, took with him officers, and they went up onto the temple mount and they brought the apostles down from the temple mount (carefully and without force or violence).

For they feared if they brought them down by force a riot might ensue and they might get stoned!

Two Questions:

Does it strike you as bizarre that these leaders feared men, but they did not seem to fear God?

Does it surprise you that the apostles did not make a scene, but simply went with the offers, although they had to know they were in trouble?

Remember what we read last week in (Acts 5:13): *"None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem."* (Ac 5:13 ESV)

The people had a tremendous respect for the new believers in general and the apostles more specially.

Thus, the Captain of the Temple and the officers with him were careful not to make a scene!

Vs 27-28 - So they brought the apostles down from the temple mount and set them before the Council, **before the Sanhedrin**. They sat them before the Sanhedrin, they sat them in the midst of the 71.

I suspect the temperature starts out a lot hotter than the last meeting.

The last meeting open with these words (Acts 4:7): *7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"* (Acts 4:7. ESV).

This time the meeting opens with these words: ***"We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."***

You can sense the tension, the hostility, and the anger in the High Priest's **three main points**: **FIRST**, we strictly charged you, we clearly commanded you with a verbal command not to teach in **this name**. Do you sense their hatred, they will not even say the name, Jesus of Nazareth.

Here the **12** stand before the **71 most powerful men in Israel**.

SECOND, you have not just violated that command, but you have **filled πληρώω (pleroo), Jerusalem with your teaching**.

Notice the High Priest calls the teachings of the apostles, **your teaching**. He does not believe in Jesus, and he does not believe this message is from God.

In fact, it seems you cannot produce enough miracles or episodes of undeniable healings to change his headered heart!

You can imagine at this charge, Peter cracked a smile, thinking indeed we fully intend to fill Jerusalem with these teachings of the resurrected Jesus!

APPLICATION: If we are ever marched in court for our relationship with Jesus, may the charge against us be that we have filled Nassau county and beyond with the teachings of the Resurrected One!

THIRD, and you clearly intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

WOW, we told you not to preach in this name. Now you intend to bring “this man’s blood upon us.” **The High Priest will not even say the name Jesus!**

The High Priest’s claim: It is clear to anyone paying any attention that you have incriminated us, the leaders of Israel **and claimed that we are responsible for his death.** By way of implication, the High Priest is denying this charge, but his position is false.

They (the Sanhedrin) were not only involved, but they were the ones who initiated the most heinous crime ever executed on earth. As Jesus Stood before the Sanhedrin, and false charges were leveled against him, he remained silent like a sheep before the sheers (Is 53:7). See (Mat 26:63-68).

You can imagine this interrogation is starting out rougher than the first and getting much hotter.

29 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."

Vs 29 - Here Peter along with the other apostles repeat what Peter and John had told the Sanhedrin the last time they were arrested, previously they posed it as a question, here they state it clearly!

We have been commanded to share the good news of Jesus Christ and **we “must” obey God rather than men!** This is very similar to what Peter and John declared during the first episode of persecution (Acts 4:18-20).

Do you sense the boldness of the apostles?

The High Priest said no more teaching in His name, and Peter said “NO!” God has commanded me to talk, and we must obey God rather than men!

APPLICATION: You and I should obey God rather than man. We should **submit to Biblical authorities unless and until** those authorities **call us to disobey God.**

Remember what Paul wrote in (Rom 13:1-2).

Vs 30-32 - Peter, along with the other apostles outline **four points** in their response to the Sanhedrin:

- 1) It is interesting that the **resurrection from the dead** is Peter’ first point.

But I hope you see the main points here, it is Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who raised Jesus from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus is the crown jewel of the gospel for the early church. Here as Peter and the apostles respond to the Sanhedrin it is their **first point.**

Yahweh, the God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead!

- 2) You **killed him by hanging him on the tree.** You killed the One God sent; you killed the author of life. Can you imagine as they leveled the charge against the Sanhedrin, **YOU** killed the Christ!

Now if you wonder why Peter calls the cross a tree, he is drawing on something Moses wrote in (Deut 21:22-23).

This highlights how rejected Jesus was, He became a curse (because of our sins).

- 3) You killed him, but **God has exalted Him to His own right hand**. The Messiah you executed, God raised Him from the dead, and has **enthroned Him at the right hand of the Father!**
- 4) He has been exalted to **give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel**.

This means **Israel needs the repentance** and the forgiveness of sins offered by the Messiah!

In fact, Peter has already told this group once (Acts 4:12).

CONSIDER: As you think about what Peter is saying to the Sanhedrin, this is the gospel. You and I have sinned and stand guilty before God, in fact our sins sent Jesus to the cross, He literally bore our curse. To prove God's acceptance of His sacrifice, Jesus stepped out of the grave alive and has ascended back to heaven and a person must repent and place faith in Jesus to receive forgiveness of sins.

There it is the undiluted, uncorrupted, pure apostle's doctrine!

There is a point here you should not miss. At this point in history, the church of Jesus Christ is made up entirely of Jews and Jewish converts. All that Luke has told Theophilus so far points only to a Jewish Messiah. Do not worry that will change and change significantly.

- 5) **We are witnesses of all of this.** We were a part of His full ministry, we were there when He was baptized, we were there for 3 ½ years as He walked among us, we were then there when you killed Him, we were there when He was placed in the grave, we were there when the Father raised Him from the dead and we were there for the 40 days prior to His ascension back to Heaven. We are eyewitnesses.
- 6) But it is not just us who are witnesses, **so too is the Holy Spirit**.
- 7) By the way the same Holy Spirit that is a witness to all of this is also the **One whom the Father gives to those who obey him** (unstated) by turning from their sins and placing faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Remember Jesus said this in Joh 14:16-17).

So how will the Sanhedrin respond to this?

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. 36 For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.

Vs 33 - When they heard the apostles seven point mini-sermon, many, most, probably almost all, **were enraged**. This word is only used twice in the entire New Testament, both by Luke. The other place is Acts (7:54).

The word brings with it the idea of **being vexed**, or of **being cut in two**. The ESV **enraged** is probably a great word. The **LSB** says they **became furious**. Bottom line is what Luke records next, they wanted to kill the apostles.

Pastor said it this past Sunday, the same sun that melts wax also hardens clay.

These same points that have led so many in Jerusalem to **repentance and faith in the Messiah**, have moved the **self-proclaimed, most religious group in Israel** to want to **kill 12 men innocent of no crimes!**

Many in the Sanhedrin, the leading religious and political body in Israel wanted to kill the apostles for what they had just said. **The Sanhedrin had enough!**

Vs 34 - But a **Pharisee**, a member of the council a man named **Gamaliel**, a **teacher who was held in honor** by all the people **stood up**.

He recognized that this was going **off the tracks** and going of the tracks **at an accelerated rate**. He stood up in the council and gave the order to **put the apostles out of the room for a little while**.

He gave the order to put the apostles out of the room while the Sanhedrin conferred about the matter.

Vs 35-36 - Then Gamaliel addressed the Sanhedrin. Men of Israel, we need to be very careful what we do with these men and how we handle this situation.

As a reminder, some time ago, a man name Theudas rose up, he claimed that he was somebody and in fact a number of men followed him, in all about 400 joined his ranks.

But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and the whole movement came to nothing.

37 After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" So they took his advice,

Vs 37 - And after Theudas, do not forget about Judas the Galilean. He rose up in the days of the census, no doubt rebelling against Rome's demands and he too drew many people away after him.

He too perished and all those who were following him were scattered.

Vs 38-39 - So now let me give advice in this present case. Stay out of this, keep away from these men, let them alone. If this is the undertaking of man, it will fall apart on its own and fail.

BUT, if it is of God, you will not be able to stop it or overthrow it. In fact, you might be even found in your efforts to be opposing God.

So they took his advice! Kinda...

YOUR PROBABLY WONDERING: So was Gamliel's advice from Godly or not? Yes, Yes, and No.

Yes – The church should never kill people over speech, nor should we try to silence people, we should rather speak to the truth in love. That is what I believe God would have us do.

Yes – If God is in it, no one can stop it. We cannot overturn what God is doing.

No – It is factually untrue that all things that are the undertaking of man fail. History has shown us **quite the opposite**. Many do fail, but Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, and Islam (as examples) **all deny who Jesus is**, are the **inventions of men**, and all are **going strong today**. Now all three are more recent than Christianity.

*** It could be that Gamaliel is hedging his bets. Not voting for or against, kinda of a wait and see. If this is the case, it is very sad.

APPLICATION: Maybe you are here today and you are waiting for more evidence. You heard the stories, you considered the statistical improbability, no statistical impossibility of one man fulfilling all of these Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, but you are waiting, waiting for more evidence.

I would submit you do not need more evidence; **you need to act on the tons of evidence that already exists.** Here's the truth, not deciding, is a decision...

40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."

Vs 40 - Then like before they **called the apostles back** into the council. Unlike the last time, this time they beat them.

This time they skipped the step about making threats and **they beat them.**

Last time they had threatened and threatened again, **this time they beat them,** and we should imagine it was fairly severe.

Then once again the Sanhedrin charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they let them go.

You can sense the resistance against the gospel is growing stronger. Although many are being saved, the ones that remain, in particular the religious leaders, are digging their heels in.

Let's be honest, the apostles had just been beaten and likely severally beaten and as best we can tell the only reason they were not killed **was because Gamliel stepped in.** Had he not stopped the meeting we cannot help but wonder if the Sanhedrin might have killed the apostles.

Vs 41 - Notice the focus of Luke is not the beating, it is rather that the apostles rejoiced, that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name, the name of Jesus!

They left the presence of the Sanhedrin **rejoicing,** that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus Christ.

The beating they received was nothing compared to the Jesus they serve!

The season we have enjoyed in the US with very little persecution will likely come to an end, it is not "normative." What is normal is that people who hate Jesus hate his followers and because they cannot take their anger out of Jesus, they take it out on his people.

Suffering is part and parcel with being a disciple of Jesus. Many verses declare this including (Jam 1:2-4; Ps 34:19; Joh 16:33; IITim 3:12; II Cor 4:17).

The time is coming when we may be called to endure persecution for the name of Jesus. We need to purpose in our hearts now so that we will be ready then.

Vs 42 - *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."*

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they apostles did not cease **teaching and preaching Jesus** and declaring that He was the promised Messiah!

This was the focus of the apostles, and this should be our focus. To teach and to preach Jesus Christ!