

11-15-20 Obedient to God.

Acts 5:17-32

How are you at being obedient?

Obedient to the laws?

Obedient to God?

How about when pressure is applied, what are you made of?

What about when persecution comes? How obedient will we be?

Society is wrapped up in fear, hatred, and violence, we see many of the churches in chaos. We see families on the brink of disaster. Anxiety is at an all-time high. If the burner keeps being turned up, how will we respond?

Will we be obedient to God?

Look around you and find eight people. Go ahead and count until you locate eight individuals. By the time you go to sleep tonight, eight people around the world will have died for their devotion to follow Jesus Christ.

Open Doors Ministries shared World Watch List for 2019:

- More than 260 million Christians – one of every eight believers – experience high levels of persecution.
- A total of 9,488 places of worship were attacked.
- 3,711 Christians were detained without trial, sentenced, and imprisoned.
- 2,983 followers of Christ were killed for faith-related reasons.

On July 8th Open Door Ministries shared an article: 'Never give up faith in Jesus': The last words of an Indian martyr.

Another article in September: In China, reporting Christian activities to police pays money. \$73 dollars to record and report any Christian events.

Open Doors Ministries has over 185 pages with multiple stories of persecution, martyrdom and God getting the glory through it all. It was awesome to see a secret video of people being baptized in Bangladesh.

As we continue our study of the Holy Spirit's actions in the Book of Acts, we come today to another outbreak of persecution against the early church.

Here's how we're going to approach **Acts 5:17-32**. First, we're going to walk through the passage, so we learn it. Then we'll allow the passage to walk through us as we seek to live it. We'll start with exposition and end with application.

Read verses 17-21

- In response to seeing so many sick people experience healing and so many people getting saved, **verse 17** says, **“the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him...and they were filled with indignation (jealousy),”**
- To be “filled with indignation (jealousy)” means they were “wholly affected and boiling with fiery wrath.” It’s true that what fills you will end up controlling you.
- In **verse 18** **“and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.”** In the previous chapter they only arrested Peter and John but now all twelve of them are thrown in the “common prison.” This is designed to both embarrass and intimidate the apostles because it’s all done for the public to see.
- I love what takes place next according to **verses 19 & 20**. Angels are messengers of God and appear throughout the pages of Scripture. Angels bring messages to an Ethiopian in **Acts 8** and to Cornelius in **Acts 10**. An angel is also involved in freeing Peter from prison in **Acts 12**.
- This makes me smile because the Sadducees don’t believe in angels, so God sends one to bring the apostles out of jail.
- The angel said, Go, stand in the temple, and speak to the people all the words of this life. (new life)
- **Verse 21**, the apostles didn’t run away, they went toward God’s plan. The apostles exhibit immediate obedience without hesitation.

Read verses 22-28

- This scene is comical, they had no idea where the apostles were, they couldn’t explain how they were out of the jail, and there is no way they would consider an angel freeing them.
- The apostles were right back doing God’s work and the religious leaders needed to shut it down!
- The high priest asked, **“Died we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?”** We commanded you, you are not being obedient, this is a display of bad behavior.
- I find it fascinating that they weren’t asked how they got out of jail. I don’t think they wanted to consider the answer because they knew it was a result of supernatural intervention.
- Notice the disdain for the name of Jesus Christ. **“his name, this man’s blood on us!”** This is the same thing they did in **Acts 4:17**, **“speak to no man in this name.”**
- In just a matter of weeks the apostles have **“filled”** Jerusalem with the gospel message. This word was used of filling a hollow place, reminding us our lives are empty and hollow until Christ fills them.
- It’s ironic the religious leaders accuse the apostles of bringing **“this man’s blood”** upon them because in **Matthew 27:25** we read what the people said in response to Pilate’s declaration he was innocent of the blood of Jesus: **“His blood be on us and on our children!”**

Read verses 29-32

- Instead of shutting down, in **verses 29-32**, Peter and the apostles speak up and give a courageous and Christ-centered response: **“We ought (must) obey God rather than men.”**

- **Verse 30**, Peter doesn't mince any words as he confronts them with their sin.
- **Verse 31** is filled with a beautiful description of where Christ is, who He is and what He does: **Where Christ is.** Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is now exalted at the right hand of God, **Who Christ is.** Jesus is both "Prince (Lord) and Savior." **What Christ does.** When we repent, Christ releases us from our sins.
- In **verse 32**, Peter comes back to the identity and task of every Christian. **"We are His witnesses"** You and I are called to be witnesses and to give witness to the One who died, rose, ascended, is exalted and is coming again!

Application

I. Obedience is a choice we all make.

- **Acts 4:19, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, you judge."**
Acts 5:29, "We ought (must) to obey God rather than men."
- All of us will make a choice many times in our life. Will we follow God or man? That man doesn't just have to be the government, that man often is the old man, the sinful fleshly man that lives inside of each of us.
- We are either listening to the voice of tradition, the desires of our own hearts, the lures of this world, or to the countless other noises around us.
- Obedience is the priority of obeying God over every other demands of life.

II. Obedience can lead us to greater struggles and trials.

- Be prepared to pay a price.
- Persevere when persecution comes. It's not a question of if persecution will come; it's when it comes. Jesus tells us in **John 15:18-20** not to be surprised when suffering shows up:
- The apostles were prepared to be arrested and imprisoned again. They were prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of preaching the Gospel.
- Obeying God does not mean everything will be fine. It does mean that God will see you through. The apostles obeyed God and they were sent back into prison.
- There is a price to pay. If we want to choose an easy life, obeying God would be difficult.
- Moses obeyed God and he faced a very defiant Pharaoh. He obeyed God and saw the Red Sea. He obeyed God and the people grumbled against him.
- Elijah obeyed God and had to run from place to place to find food and found a poor widow who did not have enough for themselves.
- David obeyed God and King Saul wanted to kill him.

- Paul obeyed God and had to run for his life. Even when you are in the center of God's will, you can face a shipwreck just like Paul.
- Jesus says, **"A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."** (John 15:20)
- But obeying God does mean that God is watching over us and will make a way for us. We can expect God to act, even in miraculous ways.
- **5:19, "But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out..." Acts 12**, Peter was freed during the night by an angel.
- Maybe this explains why Paul and Silas were singing when they were locked up in prison in **Acts 16**.

III. Obedience calls for trust in God. Leave the outcomes to Him.

- God will do His part.
- Trust God to do the impossible. Jesus said in **Luke 18:27: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."**
- He opens prison doors. He orchestrates situations for their release. He gets Paul out of danger and difficult situations.
- When we obey Him, we can expect God to be there for us.
- Members of the council were educated, ordained & religious, but they had no power. The apostles were ordinary laymen, yet God's power was at work.
- We see this divine partnership in obedience.
- When we obey Him, God makes His presence known. When we disobey, of course, you will be on your own.
- God has never called us into doing a task by ourselves. The call to obey is always a call to join Him at His work.
- Peter tells the Council in **5:32, "We are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit who God has given to those who obey Him."**
- They were not alone witnessing; the Holy Spirit is doing it with them!
- The apostles simply do what He tells them to do and leave the rest to God.
- We obey God and trust that He will take care of the outcome or consequences.
- Although God has and will continue to do many things in an instant, He has chosen to accomplish some things gradually.

- We are called to obey Him, and do His work, day by day, step by step. Even when the outcome is uncertain, we are to be committed to the work.
- This is the essence of obedience, and this is what the apostles did. **5:42 “Daily, in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as (is) the Christ.”**
- Christ’s command to them to preach the Gospel did not skip a beat despite their arrest and flogging. Even though the religious and political environment was not favorable.
- He is with us when we obediently prepare the songs for worship. He is with us when we obediently pray for a lost friend. He is with us when we give to someone in need. He is with us when we share the Gospel.
- Someone says, “The key to godliness is not more knowledge, but more obedience.” We experience God’s power because we obey, not because we know. When we walk in obedience, we are walking with Him. And His presence transforms us.
- Throughout our study in the Book of Acts, we’ve seen how God supernaturally intervened to propel His purposes forward.
- Are there any prison doors you’re longing for God to open? Do you feel like you’ve hit a dead end? Are you carrying burdens God has not designed for you to carry? Does your marriage feel hopeless? Are you struggling financially?
- It’s time to trust God to do what only He can do. I’m reminded of **Ephesians 3:20-21:**

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

IV. Obedience is anchored in our relationship with Christ.

- We are not obeying rules. We are obeying God.
- We obey God because of WHO He is. If you have a right view of God, you will have the right attitude of obedience. It’s not about a set of rules but about God.
- The more I know Him, the more I want to obey Him. You listen to someone you love.
- We don’t always understand everything God is doing but we love and trust Him, therefore we obey.
- We must purpose our hearts to obey God no matter how difficult it is. **1 Samuel 15:22 says, “To obey is better than sacrifice.”**
- **James 1:22 tells us that we must both hear and heed the Word of God: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”**
- **John 14:23, “Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”**
- The apostles chose to obey God even if it meant being put in prison. In what area of your life do you need to practice immediate obedience? Do you need to step up your gathering? Your growing? Your giving? Your going?

Conclusion

The Sadducees thought they could shut down the spread of the gospel by arresting and jailing the apostles. But every time they tried to intervene and stop it, it just gained more steam. Throughout history there have been rulers and authorities who have tried to extinguish Christianity only to discover their efforts only served to make the gospel spread faster. That's happening all over the world right now.

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