



# Central Peninsula Church

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Acts 5:12-42  
Mark Mitchell  
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## Work That Is Of God; Allegiance That Is To God

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

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We've seen in the book of Acts how bold and courageous the early believers were in the face of opposition and persecution. The first incident of persecution took place after Peter healed a lame man just outside the temple. After explaining to the crowd that this man was healed by the power of Jesus the religious leaders arrested Peter and John, threw them in jail and questioned them the next day. They released them with a stern warning not to speak in the name of Jesus.

Here in Acts 5 we have the second incident of persecution. This time not just Peter and John but several if not all of the apostles are arrested and thrown in jail. Once again, the next day they appear before the Sanhedrin. What's remarkable about this encounter isn't so much what Peter says but what the high priest says. It's a statement that gives us a good picture of what was happening in Jerusalem. He complains to the apostles in 5:28, **"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching..."** Here is quite a statement made not by an advocate of the Christian faith but by an opponent. This is an amazing testimony to the impact that the gospel was having on their little city. It's like he's saying, "I told you not to even hand people a drink of water, but now you've gone and turned a hose on and gotten us all soaked!" I wonder if he would have said that if he had known it would be preserved in the word of God for all time!

I've been thinking about this as it relates to our own purpose and vision. We want to fill the Peninsula with this teaching about Jesus. That's really what we're all about. On a smaller scale, you want to fill your neighborhood and work place with this teaching. What a tragedy to be in a place for some time and then to leave it but to leave it empty in regard to the teaching about Jesus! Right now I'm not sure if we've completed our mission. I'm not sure if one of our politicians could complain that we've filled this place with this teaching about Jesus. I would say we still have a lot of work to do in that regard.

So the question is, what can we learn from this story about how that happens? If we're going to fill the Peninsula with this teaching, what will have to happen? What will we have to do?

### I. The church experienced renewed blessings.

The story begins with another report on the health and vitality of the church. Look at vv.12-16.

**"At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed."**

There are several things we see here that are signs of health and vitality and God's blessing on the church.

*We see their unity.* Luke says they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. So they continued in the temple courts. And they were one. They loved each other; they cared for each other.

*We also see that the apostles continued to perform miracles.* There were signs and wonders to the extent that people were bringing their sick and laying them in the streets so that when Peter passed by his shadow might fall on them and heal them. This was in keeping with an ancient superstition that shadows had magical powers. It's not unusual for superstition to get mixed up in true faith. God seems willing to accommodate that until they can grow in their understanding.

*Finally, we see the impact they were having on outsiders.* In v.13 Luke records kind of a mixed reaction. People were afraid to associate with them. Maybe they had heard about what happened to Ananias and Sapphira or maybe they were afraid of persecution, so they stayed away. But at the same time they respected them; there was something about them that was right and good. These two attitudes are always evident when the Spirit is present. So they were alarming to some and appealing to others. In 2 Cor. Paul says, **"We are a**

**fragrance of Christ**" (2:16). We emit an aroma that's the fragrance of Jesus himself. And the effects of that fragrance are mixed. We smell very good to some, but not to others. Some who detect that fragrance will be drawn to the life that's in us. Others will be totally turned off. People are either attracted or repelled, but they're never the same after knowing us. That's what was occurring here in Acts, but the bottom line was that more and more people were believing in the Lord. Multitudes of men and women were being added. Sometimes we're suspicious of growth. Some people don't like growth because it means change. I'll bet there were those in the early church who just wished it could have stayed small and cozy where you could know everyone's name and fit in one living room. But here we see that growth and impact will be part of a healthy church's experience. When God is on the move people will come and we have to be willing to adjust to what God is doing. That's what's happening here. This isn't the result of careful planning and organization. This was all about God on the move.

## II. The Apostles experienced renewed persecution.

But it wasn't long before this all caught the attention of the Jewish religious leaders. Look what happens. **"But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail"** (vv.17–18). Notice once again that it's the Sadducees who are stirring up trouble. They're the religious aristocracy who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead at all. In the gospels, it was the Pharisees who most opposed Jesus, but in Acts it's the Sadducees. Notice this time it wasn't just Peter and John that they put in jail but it was all the apostles. The threat level is rising. And the reason for this: jealousy. Don't you love how honest true to life Luke is? God always deals with the deeper motives of the heart. This wasn't about truth. These men weren't standing on principle. They were resentful of the apostle's popularity, and trying to protect their own reputation and prestige.

But when a movement is of God, it's impossible to stop. Look what happens next. **"But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.' Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach"** (vv.19–21a). Luke doesn't say whether God put the jailers into a deep sleep or made the apostles invisible, but they're delivered by an angel. It's kind of funny because the Sadducees didn't believe in angels! But what an encouragement

this must have been to the apostles. God is in charge! Nothing can get in his way! When he sees fit, he can deliver us from anything that imprisons us. He can get us out on bail or he can simply send an angel.

And the angel doesn't just tell them to run and hide out and stay safe; he tells them to go and stand in the temple courts and publicly proclaim the "whole message of this new life" (literally, "all the words of this life"). What a perfect description of the good news! It's about life, not just existence, but life! Jesus said, **"I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly"** (Jn.10:10). The angel says go and preach that message of life, and they did; they obeyed. I don't think that would have been easy. That's why they were arrested in the first place. "Now you want us to go back and do the same thing?" But that's what they did. They knew that their deliverance from prison wasn't for their own personal comfort but for the spread of the gospel.

Now things really start moving. Look what happens next as the Sanhedrin convenes that morning.

**"Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, saying, 'We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.' Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. But someone came and reported to them, 'The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'"** (vv.21b–25).

You have to see the humor in this! Right now I'm thinking maybe of a Laurel and Hardy movie or Charlie Chaplin, with rapid scene changes and people running into one another. With biting humor, Luke exposes the powerlessness of the authorities to silence the church's message. Ignorant of the angelic liberation, the full Sanhedrin gathers. Solemn faced and dressed in their pompous robes, they convene the court and routinely summon the defendants. But they're mortified to find that the apostles are no longer in prison. Their agents discover guarded, locked and empty cells. While they're trying to figure out where to look next, possibly thinking about sending a search party out to scavenge the city, someone comes along and says "It's not going to be hard to find them. They're right back teaching in the temple courts, the same place where they were the last time you arrested them." The Sanhedrin is befuddled. They're trying to stop the miracles, but they're only creating more!

So they send the captain back to the temple to bring them back.

**"Then the captain went along with the officers**

and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned). When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, 'We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him'" (vv.26–32).

It's a bit ironic that the ones with all the power and authority are afraid of the people. And when the high priest speaks to the apostles he all but confesses their helplessness in light of what God was doing. In spite of their warnings and threats, the apostles had successfully filled Jerusalem with their teaching, and in the opinion of the Sanhedrin, were determined to place on them the guilt of "this man's blood." There is irony in that, too. At the trial of Jesus, this was the very thing the Sanhedrin had willingly accepted. Pilate said: "I'm innocent of this man's blood. It's your responsibility!" They answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

Then Peter spoke for the apostles. He doesn't seem frightened. He doesn't really defend himself. He doesn't try to soothe the guilt of the Jewish leaders. He says very matter of factly, "We must obey God rather than men." Government has a place, but government isn't the ultimate authority. There is a higher authority: God himself. Our allegiance is to him. When government asks us to do something contrary to an explicit command of Scripture, then we must obey God rather than man.

Then Peter launches into a mini-sermon about what God has done. The content of his message is similar to what we've seen before here in Acts. It's gospel driven. He talks about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. He says you killed him but God gave him the exalted position as Prince and Savior. He's able to grant repentance and forgiveness to Israel. And then he says, "We're witnesses of these things. That's all we are. We're just bearing witness. And, oh, by the way, so is the Holy Spirit. You know all these miracles, well, that's him bearing witness. And he's been given to all who obey God." So the sermon started with the idea of obedience and ends with the idea of obedience. The implication of course is that they're obedient while the Sanhedrin is not.

That didn't sit too well with them. Look what happens in v.33. **"But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them."** These guys

are furious and they're ready to execute them right then and there. But God intervenes for them again in another surprising way. He did it the first time with an angel, but this time he uses a respected member of the Sanhedrin.

**"But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. And he said to them, 'Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God'"** (vv.34–39).

There is a lot we could say about this speech, but let me just summarize what he says. He says, "Let's wait and see. If this movement is of men, it will die out, as we've seen before. If it's of God, nothing we do will stop it anyway." What he says here has a strong element of truth it, doesn't it? I just wish he went a little further. He could have suggested they actively check it out and see if this movement is really of God. But, still, he makes a great point, and God seems to use that to procure the apostles' release. But it wasn't without a price. Look at v.40. **"They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them."** This was the customary forty lashes minus one. It was no minor whipping. Some died from this. What a day for them. They've been arrested, jailed and flogged. I think I'd want to rethink my commitment.

But look at their response to all of this. **"So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"** (vv.41–42). Notice their attitude: they go away rejoicing. I'm sure they were hurting, too, but they rejoiced to be considered worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. They're just doing what he told them to do. Jesus said, **"Blessed are those**

**who are persecuted because of righteousness... Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...**" (Mt 5:10-12). That's what they're doing. Notice also they keep right on teaching about Jesus both in the temple and from house to house. They didn't flinch, much less rethink their commitment. So, adversity only brings advance. As one early church leader said to the rulers of the Roman Empire: "Kill us, torture us, condemn us, grind us to dust...The more you mow us down, the more we grow."

### **III. If we're going to fill the Peninsula with the gospel our work must be of God and our allegiance must be to God.**

So there is the story. I started out by asking the question: If we're going to fill the Peninsula with this teaching about Jesus, what will have to happen? What will we have to do? As I look at this story there are two things that stand out to me. First, the apostles' work was of God. And second, the apostles' allegiance was to God. In both cases these points are made in contrast to men. Their work was of God and not men. Their allegiance was to God not men.

Their work was of God and not men. What Gamaliel had speculated about is so obvious from everything that happens in this story. Back in chapter 4 they asked God to perform "**signs and wonders in the name of your holy servant Jesus**" (4:30). Here we see that God answered their prayer. We see it also in how people reacted to them. Some were afraid, others were drawn, still others were cut to the quick. There seems to be more going on here than just human responses. Their work was of God. The fact that an angel released them from jail demonstrated that as well. And then, help from the most unlikely source of all, a Pharisee named Gamaliel. You just get this sense that nothing can stop these guys.

It's like trying to stop a wave. Have you ever tried that? When you're standing out in the ocean and a huge breaker suddenly rises above you. If you try to stand up and stop it, you'll get pounded and dragged back to the shore, taking in a lot of water and rubbing your skin raw on the sand on the way. The only thing to do is to dive right into the wave. The one who dives right in will quickly find himself on the other side of the wave, floating and ready to go again. The Sanhedrin was trying to stand up and stop the wave, and they're getting pounded because it is of God.

Not only that, the apostles' allegiance was to God and not men. These very words came right out of

the mouth of Peter. It has to do with obedience. These men obeyed God when the angel said go right back to the temple and teach about Jesus. They obeyed God when they faithfully told the truth before the Sanhedrin. They obeyed God when they rejoiced to be worthy to suffer shame for the Name. And they obeyed God when they continued to teach both in the temple and from house to house, despite the warnings and the floggings.

So we learn from these men that if we're going to fill the Peninsula with the gospel our work must be of God and our allegiance must be to God. We need to ask ourselves, is our work of God? And if it is, how do we know? We can look into this very story and find some clues as to whether or not our work is of God. We know our work is of God because we depend on God rather than ourselves. We've seen over and over again in Acts how the early church was rooted in dependent prayer. They didn't know what they were doing. But they depended God. And they expressed that in prayer. Do we do that? Or do we depend on our own planning and skills? We also know our work is of God because we stay faithful to the message. The angel called it "the message of this life." We can't water it down. They didn't say to the Sanhedrin, "Well, maybe we ought to sit down and talk this out. Maybe we can learn from each other. I mean, we all believe in God. Maybe believing in Jesus isn't that important after all." Are we faithful to the message? Are we gospel driven?

Finally, we know that this was a work of God because there are things happening around us that can't be explained apart from the work of Almighty God—like someone getting healed, or getting busted out of jail, or seeing multitudes of men and women believe the gospel.

And then we need to ask ourselves, is our allegiance to God? Do we obey God or men? In our Men's Fraternity meeting on Thursday mornings we've had different men get up and share about how they integrate God and work. This past week we heard a great story from a man who has a very important position working for the city of San Francisco. He said when he got his job one of the first things he did was tell his supervisor about his faith in Christ, to which the supervisor replied, "There are three things you can never talk about in this job: sex, politics and religion." But that didn't stop him. He was told he couldn't keep a Bible in his office, but he does. He even told his supervisor that he would never work on Sunday because that was the day his family went to worship. That's a guy who has decided to obey God and not men. The funny thing is, now several years later he has not only become that supervisor's supervisor, but he's also the supervisor of that guy's supervisor! And this all right there in the place most

people think of as Sodom and Gormorrah. Are we ready to put it on the line? I'm not talking about being obnoxious and force feeding people the gospel. I'm about taking those opportunities that the Lord creates for us to speak for him, even if it means risking something that is important to you.

## **CONCLUSION**

Is your work of God? Is your allegiance to God? In *Decision* magazine a story is told about Kumar, a Christian in South India. He was grieved because none of the 13 people he had invited came to watch a Billy Graham broadcast at his home on December 23. He began to pray, and around 9 p.m. he felt God compelling him to invite his wife's sister's family to watch the next night's broadcast. He tried to contact them, but it wasn't easy. His sister-in-law's family had no phone, so Kumar had to call their neighbor and plead with him to go and bring them to the phone for an urgent message. When his brother-in-law, Satish, reached the phone, Kumar asked him and his family to catch a bus to his city as soon as possible. Satish said he had no money. Kumar encouraged him to borrow the money and said that he would reimburse Satish for the tickets. Satish consented, and at 4 a.m. he and his family boarded a bus for the long trip to Kumar's house. They arrived at 5 p.m. An hour later they watched the telecast of the Billy Graham Crusade. Afterward, Kumar gave his testimony and asked if the others wanted to put their faith in Christ. They were all looking at one another, and Kumar wondered what they were thinking. Then Satish, noticeably distressed, stood and explained that he had lost his job because the tea factory that he worked for had closed. Further, the company was demanding that the family vacate their company-owned house. Seeing no hope, the family had decided that on Dec. 25 they were all going to commit suicide. Now they saw that in Jesus there was hope, and they prayed with Kumar to accept Christ. Satish said he felt like a new man, and, after staying several more days with Kumar, the family returned home ready to face the future with Christ.

When you hear a story like that, you know that's a person whose work is of God and whose allegiance is to God. If this area is going to be filled with the teaching of Jesus that will have to be true of us as well. Our work must be of God and our allegiance must be to God.

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