

## More and Greater Hostility Acts 5:12-42

In the last paragraphs of Acts 5, two things happen to the apostles of Christ. They are again put in prison and later severely punished. Two of them had been put in prison before, according to Acts 4:3, who were later released after being warned and threatened not to continue speaking in Jesus' name.

Now the twelve are put in prison as a result of jealousy. The Jewish leaders were envious because of the popularity of the apostles and their message, confirmed by their awe-inspiring miracles. More than ever believers were added to this group, yet those who weren't sincere believers didn't dare join them. During the night, an angel of the Lord brought them out of prison and instructed them to enter the temple and proclaim the message of salvation, using these words "speak all the words of this life." The gospel consists of the words that communicate how God in Christ gives abundant, eternal life to those who trust in Him. Jesus had said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except by me." His life and the sacrifice of his life are the only way to the Father and to this kind of life.

The next morning the Jewish leaders convened and sent for the apostles, but they were not in prison, though everything appeared as if they still were. After hearing the apostles were in the temple the Jewish council had them brought to them and reprimanded them for spreading the message they were warned not to share. Peter responded that they must obey God rather than man and seized the moment to proclaim that God had raised Jesus, whom they had crucified by hanging him on a tree. His reference to crucifixion on "a tree" pointed to an Old Testament text indicating that one who was hung on a tree was under God's curse. An essential part of the meaning of Christ's death is found here and later made explicit by Paul in Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" In his death, Christ died as our substitute, taking the curse of the law we deserve for our transgressions. Peter also said that Christ was now exalted as Leader and Savior to grant repentance and forgiveness of sin to Israel. Peter sees not only forgiveness as a gift from the glorified Christ, the repentance that precedes forgiveness is also his gift. These gifts were for Israel, but not just for Israel, but to Israel, the Jew, first.

The reaction of the majority was to kill the apostles. This didn't happen because of an argument made by Gamaliel. His argument could be summarized as "wait and see". If they waited this wouldn't last if it wasn't from God. This kind of reasoning is not a valid rule for deciding what is of God, but God used it to save the lives of the apostles. But they were not saved from a very painful punishment. They were beaten. The word used here indicates the removal of skin, most likely from the use of a whip that lashed and slashed the skin. Yet, after being punished in this way, the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy of the honor of suffering dishonor for the name of Jesus. This kind of joy is supernatural. They also did not cease doing what caused their suffering. They continued to teach and preach that Jesus was the Christ. This kind of courage is supernatural.

It is easy to fear that we might not be as courageous and joyous as the apostles were if we suffered as they did. Believers are tempted to fear their faith will fail in such extreme suffering. When we doubt, we must hold on to the promise that Christ will hold on to those the Father has given him. When Corrie Ten Boom was a little girl she feared something happening in the future that seemed overwhelming to her. Her father asked, "Corrie, when you and I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you your ticket?". "Just before we get on the train" she answered. He said, "And our wise Father knows when we are going to need things too...when the time comes you will look into your heart and find the strength you need just in time." This proved to be true for her later when she was held and suffered in a Nazi concentration camp. God gives his people the grace and power they need to suffer faithfully for him, when they are going to need it.