

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Standing the Test of Time, Acts 5:12-42

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INTRODUCTION: We are excited about what is going on here in the church. The passage in Acts is really relevant to what's going on here.

A review of what happened to far in the Book of Acts: So, far in the Book of Acts:

- Jesus ascended into heaven.
- The Holy Spirit came down, and the new Church was formed.
- Peter and John and the apostles were working miracles in the name of Jesus.
- They preached the resurrection boldly.
- Many people became followers of Jesus. At the point of today's reading, there were some 5,000 men plus many women. The Church grew at fever pitch. The excitement was astounding. It was a true revival.
- Not everyone was happy. Those who worked in the temple did not like it one bit.

Here we are, verse 12 of Acts Chapter 5—

SCRIPTURE: Acts 5:12-42 ¹² *The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.* ¹³ *No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.* ¹⁴ *Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.* ¹⁵ *As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.* ¹⁶ *Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.*

¹⁷ *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.* ¹⁸ *They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.* ¹⁹ *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the*

jail and brought them out. ²⁰ “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

²⁵ Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷ The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said.

[What is this name? Jesus.]

“Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case

I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

EXPLANATION: Now, that’s a lot of scripture, but we are in church. And, the Bible is what we read in church. But, the narrative here is very important to know what’s going on so my message to you will make some sense. There are three points to my message today, and here they are:

1. The temple employees fought an old battle.
2. Gamaliel’s logical argument defused the mob.
3. The apostles rejoiced in their suffering.

First, THE TEMPLE EMPLOYEES FOUGHT AN OLD BATTLE.

EXPLANATION: The temple employees in Acts 5 were fighting a battle, which had already been settled earlier. They had already been through this with Jesus. They had already been through this with the miracles of Jesus. They had already been through this with his crucifixion of Jesus. Now, they felt threatened, and they seemed to act to the apostles as if they had not already been through this routine. They knew what was happening. A new day had come. Jesus was the Savior. Jesus was the Messiah.

ILLUSTRATION: I read a book called *Thirty Years: A Survivor*. The book was about a WWII Japanese soldier. The Japanese put men on the small islands in the Pacific, and they told them to hide and do reconnaissance until they received further instructions. They would put a few men or sometimes one man on an island. They were supposed to keep watch and do what they were told.

This particular book was about a man who survived 30 years on a jungle island in the Philippines. No one ever came to tell him the war was over. He lived in the mountains, and occasionally, he would raid the villages in the valleys. In his one-

man raids, his goal was to let the people know he was still there and that the Japanese military was still there. But, he was merely following orders, waiting to get further instructions. Finally, after 30 years, he surrendered when the Japanese politicians sought out the commanding officer who gave him the original command. And, they took the commanding officer to the island to tell the soldier the war had been over for 30 years.

In the book, which was also an autobiography, the Japanese soldier talks about all his wasted years fighting a war which had been settled years ago.

APPLICATION: It's a waste of time dealing with things already settled. How often do we repeat our own mistakes? How often do we get caught in this bad cycle of repetition even though the issue has already been settled? I'm afraid we do it too often. I'm afraid we are too much like this Japanese soldier—fighting old wars—hanging on to something decided long ago. People fight personal battles settled long ago, family battles settled long ago, institutional battles settled long ago.

FURTHER EXPLANATION: And, here in Acts Chapter 5, we have religious people trying to preserve a style of worship already updated by Jesus. I can just hear the Sanhedrin arguing how the Church had never done these things before. I can imagine the raised voices in the Sanhedrin deciding whether these men should even be allowed in the temple.

APPLICATION: In our own church, let's learn from this drama as it's played out in Acts 5. Let's not fight old battles. If things have been settled, then they are settled. If the majority has voted on something and you don't agree, it does nothing but hold the Church back if you keep bringing it up over and over. We must move forward. We cannot be like the Sanhedrin arguing against the wonderful things God was doing.

Second, GAMALIEL'S LOGICAL ARGUMENT DEFUSED THE MOB.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever been in a meeting which was less than enjoyable? You're sitting there, and you start thinking about what's next—the lunch you'll have afterward. You're rewarding yourself with the thought so you can endure the meeting? Have you ever been in one of those meetings where people raise their voices, and no one really knew what to do? Well, that's what was going

on in the Sanhedrin—this court of people meeting together. *What are we going to do about these wonderful men that are working these miracles in the Name of Jesus?*

Well, here is Gamaliel, a respected man. And, he brought common sense to the situation.

APPLICATION: It is good to listen to wise people. It's good to listen to peace makers. It's good to be a peace maker. And, I want to ask you this: Do you seek wise counsel? Do you think it's best to be a peace maker?

EXPLANATION: Gamaliel thought it was best to stand back and see if the work the Christians were doing stood the test of time, because if it did stand the test of time, then this would be the work of God. And, no one would want to be accused of stopping the work of God.

In Gamaliel's argument, he presented two people.

1. This first one was Theudas. He was a man who lived around 4 BC. He claimed to be a prophet or the Messiah. Well, he died, and guess what? The movement ended.
2. And, then Gamaliel talks about Judas the Galilean. This man lived around 6 or 7 AD. And, he started the zealot movement. He shamed people for paying taxes to the Romans, and he believed this movement from God.

But, Josephus, a historian of the day, wrote this about the zealots:

...They have a passion for liberty that is almost unconquerable, since they are convinced that God alone is their leader and master.

But, that movement also died shortly after the leaders died.

So, Gamaliel's logic was if this new Christian movement was from God, it would outlast the apostles, and it would be from God. That's a good argument to throw out to religious people. But, Gamaliel's logic was flawed a little bit because there are movements that outlast its people.

But, the Bible tells us that all false religions will die. Several times in Revelation God says, *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End* (Revelation 22:13).

When I was a child, I didn't know what "Alpha and Omega" meant. They are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. In other words, God said, "I am the A to Z. I'm everything."

What is not of God will disappear even if it outlasts us and our lifetime. All of man's works are temporary. Some last longer than others, but if it's an invention of man—it will fade away

Gamaliel's argument reminds me of 1 Corinthians 1, when Paul tells us:

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 13:10 ¹⁰ *But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away* (NKJV).

And—

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:19-21 ¹⁹ *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,* ²⁰ *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* ²¹ *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (ESV).

ILLUSTRATION: Now, there are movements that have happened in our lifetime. In 1997, there was a man named Marshall Applewhite. Probably no one knows who he was today. But, in 1997, he was on the news, and all of us would have known about him. He was founder of Heaven's Gate Cult. He led himself and 38 other people to commit suicide. They believed a space ship was following a comet. He taught his people they would catch the space ship and the space ship would take them to a higher plane of existence if they would all commit suicide when the comet was closest to earth.

We look at this cult and tragedy and wonder how could anyone believe this stuff? Well, 38 people believed it.

ILLUSTRATION: Recently, I mentioned Jim Jones of the People’s Temple and David Koresh of the Branch Dravidians. I looked up the numbers of people who followed them to their deaths. For Jones, it was over 900 deaths. For Koresh, over 70 people. How many are in the People’s Temple today? None. How many Branch Dravidians are there? I couldn’t find of any.

APPLICATION: Man-made religions will disappear, if not in our lifetime, eventually.

BACKGROUND: Gamaliel had been around the block a few times, and his words about giving the Christians some time diffused the angry mob. They were ready to kill the Christians, but Gamaliel calmed the situation.

APPLICATION: Be a peace maker to the world—at home, at work—wherever you go. Learn not to jump to conclusions, learn to give others the benefit of the doubt, and be careful not to criticize the movement of God, even if you’ve never seen him move that way before. Back off and take Gamaliel’s advice: If it’s of God, it will last.

Review—

- I’ve told you about the temple employees who fought this old battle which was already decided.
- I’ve told you about Gamaliel’s logical argument and how it diffused the mob.

And now—

Third, THE APOSTLES REJOICED IN THEIR SUFFERING.

EXPLANATION: Gamaliel’s words persuaded the Sanhedrin, but not entirely. Apparently, the Sanhedrin wasn’t too convinced the apostles words were of God because they had the apostles flogged. Flogging was a vicious beating. But, the Sanhedrin beat them and ordered them not to speak in Jesus name. So guess what they did?

They did two things:

1. They rejoiced in their suffering.

APPLICATION: I don't know that I've ever rejoiced in suffering. But, we must remember those who rejoice in sufferings for cause of Christ. Throughout history, we have stories people who have rejoiced in their suffering.

It is not human nature to rejoice in suffering. Flogging was true suffering. Christian persecution around world today is true suffering. Sometimes we use the word "persecution" for insults hurled our way due to our Christian stand, but really insults are not really true persecution on the level of real persecution. Usually it's just discrimination. It's nothing like public flogging or other types of persecution around the world today.

And, when we are put down for Christ's sake just with words, none of us rejoice. But, when these men were physically beaten, they rejoiced the Lord counted them worthy to be disgraced in his name. Wow!

2. They were told not to preach in Jesus' name, so they preached in Jesus' name!
We have a sincere act of civil disobedience.

John Stott put it this way:

If the authority concerned misuses its God-given power to command what he forbids or forbid what he commands, then the Christian's duty is to disobey the human authority in order to obey God's (John Stott, *The Message of Acts*).

And, this is when the apostles' said, "*Who do we obey here? God or man?*"

They gained a lot of confidence because of the miracles in Jesus' name. If you were in jail and an angel let you out and locked it back, it would give you a great deal of confidence, no matter what, God will take care of you.

- The angel gave them confidence.
- Their knowledge and eye-witness account of the resurrection of Christ gave them confidence.
- The encouragement of their believers in their group gave them confidence.

It was a new day, and they were glad to be a part of a new day. A whole lot happened in the Church in a very short period of time. How exciting it must have been. And, I say that in the past tense, but it doesn't have to be past tense, does it?

APPLICATION: How exciting it could be if all of this happened again. Would we be prepared for it? Would we have the naysayers who stand off in the corner trying to analyze and trying to figure out how to stop the work of God? Probably so. But, did the Sanhedrin stop the work of God? Not at all. No.

The work of God continued. And, the work of God is this: It is sharing the Good News of Christ to a lost and dying world. This is the Gospel.

CONCLUSION: We should have great confidence today because of the record we have in the Bible it all happened. We should be just as confident. We should obey God rather than men.

You can be part of the Church talked about in the Book of Acts. You can be a part of that Church because that Church is this Church. That was the beginning of the Church which spread all over the world and is alive and well today.

First, you must repent of your sin. You must seek Jesus as Lord and Savior. And, when you become a follower of Jesus, you will be in this Church mentioned here in Acts Chapter 5.

Today, we are here because of them and God's Holy Spirit working through them—as well as churches all over the world worshipping Jesus this morning. Now, you can become a follower of Jesus right now by surrendering to him. Because that's what it is. It is surrender. It's a letting go of your will and saying "yes" to the will of God through Jesus Christ. It's letting go of what you've always believed to be true, but now that you've heard the truth, you have to make a decision. That's what it is. The Gospel means good news, and the good news is here for you. It is here for everyone.

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