

History in the Making
Understanding the Book of Acts
Lesson Eleven

Introduction: The narrative today follows the very swift and stern judgment delivered to Annanias and Sapphira after lying to Peter regarding their gift to the young church.

- ✓ 5:11-Great fear came upon all the church
- ✓ 5:12-Apostolic ministry of supernatural continued
- ✓ 5:13-People highly esteemed church but cautiously joined themselves to the church
- ✓ 5:14-Church did continue to grow
- ✓ 5:15, 16-Unusual miracles occurred (Peter's shadow and exorcisms)
- ✓ 5:17-21-High Priest and other leaders of Sadducees sect angrily arrested the apostles again (Peter and John had been arrested earlier in 4:1-4)
- ✓ At night an angel opened prison doors, released them and gave them a command

"Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." Acts 5:20 NKJV

- ✓ They obeyed early next morning
- ✓ Council convened and sent for the apostles

Report of the Apostles deliverance/peaceful arrest

But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" 24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. 25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" 26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. Acts 5:22-26 NKJV

Interrogation of Apostles/Peter's deliverance

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." Acts 5:27-32 NKJV

Anger of Sadducees

When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. Acts 5:33 NKJV

Advice of Gamaliel

Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God." Acts 5:34-39 NKJV

Perpetuation of the Church

And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:40-42 NKJV

Great story-powerful narrative

- ✓ Clear example of God's sovereign control over His church
- ✓ His divine protection of His apostles
- ✓ Befuddling the opposition to His work

But, looking closer-both in positive and negative examples-helpful insights regarding the nature of believers that will "make history."

Four of them

I. Possess a zeal that is biblically grounded.

A. The zealousness of the Sadducees had been brewing

1. After the healing of the lame man (3) and Peter's sermon the Sadducees began to confront them regarding Jesus

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Acts 4:1-2 NKJV

(“Came upon them”-ephistemi) strong word

- a. Luke 20:1-Confronted him (elders/scribes)
 - b. Acts 6:12-Come upon, seize, arrest Stephen
 - c. Acts 17:5-Mob “attacked” or “assaulted” house of Jason
2. Now again in 5:17-Sadducees filled with indignation and they arrest the apostles
- a. Hated the apostles preaching on the resurrection
 - b. Believed only Sadducees (Hasmoneans) should instruct in spiritual matters
 - c. Messianic claims were at best mistaken, at worst, political revolutionists
- B. Their zeal may originally have been a passionate consuming zeal focused on God, or doing His will, or maintaining his honor in the face of these ungodly acts by the apostles
1. Their jealousy will deepen as apostles will defy their authority

But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19-20 NKJV

2. Finally lay their hands on them

C. Most Jews will do this in Acts

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Acts 13:45 NKJV

But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. Acts 17:5 NKJV

D. Their zeal is without knowledge

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Romans 10:1-2 NKJV

“When zeal is not grounded in the whole truth of God, or it is mixed with human power or opinion, it can easily become personal jealousy, masquerading as piety.” –Grant Osborne

- ✓ Great harm done
- ✓ Great destruction

Pastoral thoughts-Observed issues of zeal not grounded in the whole truth:

- ✓ Denominational distinctive (but have not love...sounding brass/clanging cymbal)
- ✓ Matters of worship preference
 - Older generation won't hear the passion of the younger one
 - Younger generation arrogantly thinks they have a new thing
 - Disrespect for elders/squelching of younger
 - Zeal without knowledge that destroys
 - Matters of dress, tradition, communion, baptism

When our zeal is biblically grounded

- ✓ Others are loved and embraced despite differences
- ✓ Rights and preferences are laid down for others
- ✓ Jesus is exalted

II. Model an obedience that is self-surrendering

A. First time they were arrested they received a charge

So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. Acts 4:18-21 NKJV

B. This second time they remind them of this charge

Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:26-29 NKJV

C. At least 3 things that evoke this kind of obedience

1. An awareness and confidence in the supreme nature of Christ's authority

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Acts 5:30-31 NKJV

NOTE: Sanhedrin was powerful but Christ even more

2. A deep appreciation of their unique calling “And we are his witnesses to these things.” (v. 32)
3. A reverent understanding of their privileged partnership “and so also is the Holy Spirit when God has given to those who obey Him.” (v. 32)

WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN!

III. Declare an unhesitatingly decisive confession of faith.

NOTE: The advice of Gamaliel

And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God." Acts 5:35-39 NKJV

- A. He appeals for a “hands off”-“wait and see” attitude toward Jesus
 1. Refers to two contemporary examples of failed revolutionary movements. Theudas and Judas
 2. These died with the death of their leader-likely Christians will too
- B. It is likely that Gamaliel, a top-ranking Pharisee, was jabbing at the Sadducees rather than defending Jesus or the apostles
 1. The Pharisees were minority on the council but strong voice because of their favor with the people
 - a. Small lay movement promoting strict adherence to written and oral Torah
 - b. Sadducees believed only in human causation of history-Pharisees believed in the causation of both humanity and God
 2. His advice was certainly pragmatic and good counsel to the over-zealous Sanhedrin
- C. But a wait and see approach to the Gospel must be transformed into a decisive confession of faith

Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Acts 5:31 NKJV

1. I will follow
2. No compromise
3. No turning back or waiting to see

IV. Live with an eternal and grateful perspective

And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:40-42 NKJV

- A. Still didn't pay attention to the ban of Jesus' name
 1. In the temple and every house they preached
 2. Theme was always Jesus Christ
- B. The beating did not dishearten them
- C. A cause to rejoice-God considered them worthy to endure humiliation for the sake of Jesus' name
- D. Their pain was insignificant when compared with the disgrace and anguish that Jesus had endured-participating in His suffering
- E. This has been the hallmark of Christianity since Pentecost

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 1 Peter 1:6 NKJV

But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 1 Peter 4:13 NKJV

Conclusion: The nature of those who will make history~

1. Biblically grounded zeal
2. Self-surrendering obedience
3. Decisive confession
4. Eternal and grateful perspective