

## Acts 5:25-42 'Counting The Cost'

Last week in Acts we looked at chapter 5:11-25 'Standing Our Ground In Jesus' Name'. Verse 11 says "great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events." This was at the death of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. But I explained that such a fear of the Lord seems to have disappeared today. God hasn't changed but our perception of Him has changed! He is no longer to be feared. It seems we know Him better now. Yes, that evil familiarity pervades Christendom today!

We need to remember that we are "in God's presence", and that where God is: "holy ground". So we need to take off the sandals of our hearts!

Verse 12, miracles abound; verse 13 "no one else dared join them", verse 14 "nevertheless many were added to their number." Matthew Henry explains that only serious followers dared come because crucifixion was all too real and the stakes were life and death. Standing for Jesus comes at a cost!

More miracles in verses 15 and 16 as Jesus establishes the apostle's ministry then again, that inherent evil of the religious elite rises up in a covetous, idolatrous jealousy. So Peter and John are arrested yet again v17-18. But verse 19, they are miraculously delivered by "an angel of the Lord" Then in v20 they are told to "go and stand in the temple courts and teach the people." As Paul put it in Ephesians 6:13: "put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to take your stand, and after you've done everything, to stand." Well the men at the first light honour that commission. They go right back into that very place where they had been arrested more than once! But the religious elite are out for blood, so soldiers are sent to get the men, but the doors are locked with the guards on duty and yet the apostles are nowhere to be found. So the report gets back to the council where everyone is dumb struck, until a messenger arrives! 'Those guys who you put in gaol for preaching in the temple courts are preaching in the temple courts'.

And that's where we pick up the account: Acts 5:25-42 'Counting The Cost'. Verse 25 "then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in gaol are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." Brothers and sisters, as I said last time, this was completely counter intuitive to self-preservation for the men. Over the years I've been asked when I've been surfing if I ever worry about sharks. My answer is always twofold. If I see a shark out there I most likely won't paddle out. But also, if God wants a shark to eat me, there is nothing I can do to prevent that. It would even come up and get me in my car while I'm driving away.

Psalm 39:15-16 "My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

Friends, the reality is that in life, there are different kinds of danger which surround the Christian all the time. And we must use our God given wisdom to avoid that danger if possible. But if God calls us to stand for Him in a place of difficulty or danger, in Jesus' Name, then with prayer we must do so, and leave the rest to Him!

Well Peter and John are instructed to yet again "go and stand in the temple courts and teach the people" so they do. Trusting God, come what may. Now for us, it might not be a life and death situation as it was for these men. It may simply be inviting a family member or friend to church or some kind of outreach event. But what we are doing is putting ourselves on the line for our Saviour.

Inviting rejection, inviting ridicule and even enmity. Dan and Becky in Indonesia; The Cooks in Vanuatu, and indeed many others around the world in even more dangerous places have gone there to testify, yes "to teach the people about Jesus." And we are all to do it for the same reasons. We are eternally grateful to God for all that He has done for us in our lives through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. So we want to share those blessings with those who we know and care about, who are perishing in their sins. Always giving all of the praise and glory to God! Yes judgement is coming. Yet mercy is at hand through Jesus!

Can you imagine? Those religious sharks are circling the apostles. They seem to have escaped, to have only then willingly dived back into those same shark infested waters. This didn't make sense to those evil men. If you remember, the first time this happened in Acts 4:13 "when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled ordinary men they took note, that these men had been with Jesus." Nothing else made any sense. The only thing which made any sense at all to these evil men was yes, "these men had been with Jesus." They are just like Him. He wasn't afraid of them either.

They threatened and arrested and imprisoned Peter and John again, but they'd escaped, and yet here they were again "teaching the people in Jesus` name in the temple courts," fearing no one but God Himself! 'What is going on here?', these great poohbahs are thinking. V26 "at that the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles." Notice the words: "they did not use force because they feared that the people would stone them." How amazing that those with all of the power and the authority were fearful, but not those who stood their ground in Jesus` Name. Again, none of it made any sense. But that that's right, "these men had been with Jesus" V27 "having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin. To be questioned by the high priest."

But first, let's just set the scene a bit. There are 70-100 men sitting in a semicircle with three rows of the learned men who stood behind them, and the clerks (the note takers), in the front row. It was a scene no doubt, which was intended to intimidate those who were brought before them! Present, were all of those who had found Jesus guilty on false charges and had ultimately had him crucified, as well as a throng of others. So all of the religious and intellectual elite. And there before them all, stood Peter and John and apparently some other apostles. Then either Caiaphas, or his father-in-law Annas, begins the interrogation. Look at the words in v28: "we gave you strict orders." Friends, let's not quickly skim over these words. "Strict orders" coming from those who have your life in their hands, and having been delivered with violent threats and warnings were not to be taken lightly.

Indeed, these threats were not taken lightly by the brethren. Acts 4:29 "now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." Brethren, as those who would testify for Jesus we are not asked to be foolish. "Wise as serpents and gentle as doves" the scriptures say. We should never seek to stand in our own strength, because it is not our message which we carry, no. We speak in Jesus` Name. That is why these men were yet again standing in court with their lives on the line! But just like today, if they were rambling about themselves they wouldn't have a problem. It's the fact that they spoke in Jesus` Name and of Him which brought the full weight of the council down upon their heads! Yet They had committed it to God in prayer, so they rested in His Hands. Yes, they had been given "strict orders," but do you remember Peter and John's response in Acts 4:19-20? "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Look again at v28 because it is revealing: "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, and yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching."

Why did they go into the temple courts? Because it was the centre of Jewish society and through that place Christ's Gospel would go into the whole Jewish world! Brothers and sisters, whatever tier of society or part of the community in which you find yourself, whether it's playing golf, bowels, surfing, volunteering for the fire brigade, working or if you are a resident of a retirement village, yes

whatever it is, Jesus can use you for His Glory and bring people into His kingdom in that place. It's just that we, (like the apostles here), need to commit it to prayer. He will do His work and He will call His people. The question is: will we, like them, stand in His strength and speak in His name? Yes "we gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." And notice what he says next: "you are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Do you remember what the crowd called out when Pontius Pilate sought to release Jesus? Matt.27:25 "all of people answered "let his blood be on us and on our children." But now, (even as Pontius Pilate sought to wash Jesus' Blood from his hands), the high priest says "you are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

The thing is brothers and sisters, that these men were literally guilty of Jesus' physical death! They knowingly tried Him on false charges, finding Him "worthy of death" they hauled Him before Pontius Pilate to rubberstamp His execution, and even when he found no accusation worthy or creditable and wanted to release Jesus, they incited the crowd to cry out for one, who was worthy of death!

Brethren, isn't it amazing that those who literally put Jesus to death, (though I know that we as sinners are all responsible for that death), but isn't it amazing that those who proudly and even boastfully claimed the responsibility for Jesus' blood, are declaring their own innocence. Surely the thing that this reveals to us, is that even when the evidence of our own iniquity is placed before us, we will do any and everything to deny that role, which we played in crucifying the Saviour of the people of God! Matt.27:25 "let his blood be on us and our children." Acts 5:28 "you are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 'These are false accusations', they cry. What do you mean by spreading such rumours? We had nothing to do with the death of that man. It's all lies!

In Peter's first sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2, he accused them of Jesus' death. In his second sermon after healing the crippled man, he also accused them all of Jesus' death. In Acts 4 at their first defence, Peter yet again accused the religious elite of Jesus' death. And now for the 4th time, while standing before the religious and intellectual powers that be, with great authority, he hurls down at their feet the death, of the risen Lord at this farce of a trial! V29: "Peter and the other apostles replied, "we must obey God rather than men." Yes, they stood before some 200 men, with the power of life and death in their hands, but with Christ in their hearts!

"Peter and the other apostles replied." Now who the other apostles that were with Peter and John I'm not sure, but it does appear that Peter spoke on the other's behalf. Yes, "Peter and the other apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than man. The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, who you killed by hanging him on a tree."

Beloved, I was so struck by the fact that each time Peter has spoken of Jesus thus far to the Jewish people about Christ, whether they be rich man or poor man pauper or priest, he lay the responsibility for His death down at the feet of his hearers. There has got to be something significant in this for us. Surely the message is that without Christ's cross preached and our role in nailing Him to that tree, there is not the gospel! To speak of the love of God to His People, without telling them of that greatest of all acts of love even for all eternity, (which we are not only the recipients of but also the cause of), is not the gospel. It may be a gospel, but it is not The Gospel. Christ's Gospel!

As I've said over the years, to appreciate and understand God's Salvation for us which has come through Jesus, we need to know and understand that there is indeed something from which we are being saved. Sin is the disease and hell is the consequence, and there is but one cure. The life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven! Friends may I suggest, that without understanding and laying a hold of the first, that there is indeed something from which we must be saved, (while appreciating the gravity of it all) there will be no access to the second. The reward or heaven. Yes we need to fully grasp that there is something from which we are being saved. Judgement and hell are real. Luke18:13 "but the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat upon his breast, and said, God have mercy on me the Sinner"! In v30-31 we read "the God of

our fathers raised Jesus from the dead whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. We are witness of these things so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Brothers and sisters, we shouldn't overlook the power and significance of this occasion. The high priest on behalf of the rest of the council has tried to do a Pontius Pilate, but Peter and the others will have none of it. In Acts 4:29 the prayer was that they would “speak the truth with great boldness”, and God has continued to answer that prayer before the Sanhedrin. The council is now accused of not only killing Jesus the man, but of murdering God's Own Messiah! God exhorted Him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.” All of those sacrifices for 1500 years have pointed to this Jesus as God's Promised Redeemer, and you have murdered Him!

The outcome of Peter's words doesn't take a genius to figure out. Jesus is the Prince, the Son of God, the King. He has been exalted to the Right Hand of God. Yes the right hand. That position of power and authority and privilege over all things. And these men have murdered him! Again Beloved, self-preservation is not the aim of the apostles here. It was to give glory to God, while testifying to the truth about Jesus. Everything else as far as the repercussions for doing so are in God's hands!

In v29 Peter says, “we must obey God rather than man” and in v32 “the Spirit of God is given to those who obey him.” The implication clearly is that we are obeying God, that is why we speak in Jesus` Name. ‘You are against, yes you are enemies of God, that is why you killed His Son’. No the outcome of Peter's words doesn't take a genius to figure out. V33 “when they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.” When Steven, (the first martyr of the New Testament which is mentioned), made his defence before the same men in verse 54 of Acts7 it says, “they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.”

Again Beloved, let's not underestimate the vehemence of the hatred of the world in Satan's hands against the people of God. Remember what Satan does: 1 Peter5:8 “beware your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking souls to devour.” It has been said that Satan feeds upon the souls of humanity. These men were like rabid dogs out for blood. “They wanted to put them to death.” We don't have rabies in Australia, thank God, because when a dog gets rabies, it foams at the mouth and his uncontrollable and must be put down. Those also who are infected with that same madness having been bitten, if they don't get treatment go mad. Well so too had this supposed council of God become! And yet just as He had miraculously delivered them from the prison, God sends yet another miraculous deliverance, and from the midst of the enemy no less!

Brothers and sisters, we are never alone when we are in trouble. We might think we are but it's not the case. God never leaves us! Whether you are battling through cancer, or struggling through a marriage breakdown or dealing with the loss of a loved one, you are never alone! Psalm 139:1-14 we read “My Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise, you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down, you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in behind and before, you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your spirit and where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there, if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful, I know that for well.”

No, He never leaves us and has placed His Spirit within us. And in our darkest hour, He is there!

Then in v34 God's deliverer enters the narrative. And then in v35-40a, Gamaliel stands between this rabid mob and the apostles. He is a deliver from the most unlikely place! Unlike the high priest and all of his mob who were Sadducees and didn't believe in celestial beings or the resurrection or in the afterlife, Gamaliel was a Pharisee. He did believe in the afterlife. He did also believe in the day of judgement at the resurrection! In v34 we learned that he was "honoured by all the people." All the religious and political factions honoured Gamaliel. In Acts 22:3, we learn that Paul was mentored by Gamaliel, raised up by him in the things of the scriptures. So he was a qualified man. And he was a respected man. A man to whom all should listen! He basically presents the argument that if these men are not of God, they will fail. But if they are of God, the council will be making God their enemy. Well his argument prevails, but there is still a cost, which the apostles must pay.

Verse 40b: "they called them in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go." Being lashed with the cat of nine tails often lead to death. This was a particular whip which was embedded with glass and bone, and when it wrapped around a person's body tore skin off them. This is where we get that saying 'I'll tear strips off you'. No, this was not a get out of gaol free card!

Brothers and sisters, as I close this morning, we must ask ourselves, is this One whom we serve, and the price which He has paid, and the promises which He has made to us, worthy? Yes are these things worthy of that road which we have been called to walk upon by Him worthy of our commitment? And can we trust him?

Yes we must count the cost and weigh up against the prize which awaits us. The few years that we have in this life which are often filled with trials and pain, weighed against an eternity spent in the Presence of The Creator, and Ruler of the Universe. And also with all of those that we love who have gone before us! Yes we must count the cost! Having been flogged to within an inch of their lives, "the apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of disgrace for the name". (Verse 41) We read in verse 42 "day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."