



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts: 5:17-42

Acts

"Suffering Shame for the Name"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in the book of Acts, we're in chapter 5, and we're going to finish up the chapter which is a lengthy portion of Scripture, verses 17 through 42. I'm going to read the entire text and make a few comments. The apostles have been preaching; they've been doing miracles. Many people have come to faith, and so we read in verse 17: 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. 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.

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the council together, 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!" 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 preaching

in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 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 Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Now I want to make a brief comment on this because I'm not going to develop it in the lesson. But what Peter is saying here is that faith-repentance is a gift of God. He is not saying in verse 31 that God, or Jesus Christ "grants." And that word "grant" is "to give," gives forgiveness to those who repent. He gives the repentance that leads to the forgiveness. And I think that's supported in verse 32. The verse is not giving obedience as the condition of the gift of the Holy Spirit, but rather, it's giving obedience as the result of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We can read this statement, and I think it's pretty clear in the text, the second half of verse 32: "And so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." And the idea is God gave past tense to those who are presently obeying. Their obedience is the result of the past gift of the Holy Spirit. What he's doing here is he's preaching the sovereign grace of God, which is characteristic of apostolic preaching.

Well, that's his sermon, and we read in verse 33 the response: But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 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."

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. 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.

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. It's our privilege to go to the throne of grace; and let's do that at this time.

[Prayer] Father, we do consider it a privilege to come before the throne of grace and remember those who have asked for our prayers. And there are many, Father, who are suffering difficulties, physical affliction, grief; and we pray for them. We pray that you would give comfort to those who grieve, and pray that you would give comfort with the knowledge of your grace and your mercy. We pray that you would strengthen your people.

Lord, we do thank you for making us your people, we who believe in Jesus Christ. We recognize that, ultimately, we are men and women who believe, who obey, who love you because you first loved us. We are reminded that from beginning to end, and we are reminded of that in our passage today, and we pray that we would be taught that, and we would embrace, and we would rejoice in your sovereign grace, and thank you for it, Father, daily. May our lives be lived as a response to that, a response of thanksgiving and worship. And we are reminded of your greatness in so many areas in our text.

You are sovereign over this world and sovereign over our lives, and we can trust you for every event that comes our way. Help us to be that kind of people. So build us up in the faith this morning, and bless us as we study and as we worship together, and then bless us again this evening as we return to remember the Lord, remember his death for us, and remember that he's coming again. We look forward to that day. May we live for it. May we not be time servers, but may we live for eternity. And pray all of this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Message] One of the poems that most of us had to memorize when we were young students and most of us have probably forgotten was Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. It celebrated the hopeless charge of an English brigade of light Calvary in the Crimean War, and glorified the deaths of men who had actually followed foolish orders. But it has that memorable line in it: "Theirs not to

make reply, theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die. Into the valley of Death rode the six hundred."

And there is something truly Christian in that because we too are soldiers in the faith. The apostles liken us to that. We have God's armor and a spiritual sword, Christ is our captain; and as people under his authority, we are sometimes sent into dangerous places: the valley of death.

We see that in our passage of Acts 5, which gives us some principles of conduct. First of all, we are reminded of our mission. We are to be witnesses for Christ. That is our task; that is our soldierly duty; that is how we engage in spiritual conflict and fight the good fight.

Secondly, we are guided by divine orders, by God's Word; not by our wits, not by human reason, but Scripture, and we must obey. So, thirdly, because we must obey, our attitude is to be one of trust. We can be certain that the Lord never issues foolish order. His Word is wise and he leads us wherever we go. We are always well-protected. He never sends us on a hopeless charge.

Well, we see that throughout the book of Acts how the church, guided by Christ, empowered by the Spirit, enjoyed great success in dangerous places. When we come to our text in verse 17 of Acts 5, it is enjoying enormous success. The church has gone through the hard experience of discipline. Two members were severely judged, Ananias and Sapphira; but the result of that was a purifying effect upon the church. In fact, the church seems to have grown even stronger.

The apostles were now preaching and doing great miracles. Multitudes were being healed and saved. It seems the church was even more active than before. In fact, the ministry was spreading now beyond the city of Jerusalem. Verse 16 states that people from the cities in the vicinity, all the villages around Jerusalem, were coming, and all were being healed. Great things were happening in Jerusalem and they did not go unnoticed by the authorities who had earlier tried to put a stop to the apostles activity but had failed. Now we read in verse 17 that the priests, the Sadducees were filled with jealousy.

Why, we might wonder, would anyone be jealous or angry over people being healed and saved and blessed? And the reason is because they saw their influence decreasing and the apostles influence increasing. The Sadducees were the official leaders. They were men with political power, but without any real spiritual or moral

authority. The Sadducees were not a popular group of men. So when they saw simple fishermen from the rural area of Galilee performing miracles and drawing great crowds, some think, "These priests could never do," they became jealous.

A sign of a weak ministry, a fleshly ministry is jealousy, self-promotion. That betrays a bad motive. Ministry, whether it be ministry from the pulpit or ministry from the pew, because you as a believer in Jesus Christ are called to the ministry. You have your task to perform, you have your work to do. We're all to be engaged in this great mission of witnessing for Christ, and ministering to one another, and bearing one another's burdens. But ministry is not about us, it is about him.

When the followers of the great 18th century evangelist George Whitefield wanted to perpetuate his memory by forming a denomination with him as the head, he said, "Let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified." That's the right attitude.

The Sadducees were far from that. Their motto was, "Let the name of Christ perish." In fact, later in verse 28 when Caiaphas had occasion to speak the name Jesus, he would only refer to him in such phrases as, "This name," and, "this man." His reluctance to pronounce the Lord's name indicates that he was resisting him, still in this state of resistance; and it shows how difficult it was for him to even think about Jesus Christ, and to hear that he was alive and triumphant.

Jealousy drives a lot of the evil that happens in the world; and even the disagreements and disruptions that occur in a church. Often it is the result of one self-seeking. And if our text is a model for that, then what often occasions jealousy is faithful service in others. People are being used by God, they're being blessed, they are enjoying success in the ministry, and others see that and they become jealous of the attention that others get.

None of us is exempt from that danger. We all struggle with pride and are weak in our appreciation of grace. In fact, I would say that that is the reason for such problems as jealousy in others that arise, we have a weak understanding of the grace of God. We don't understand that everything we have, whether it be our health, or our abilities, or our gifts spiritually, or whatever area of life they may be exercised in; our opportunities in life, all of them are a gift of God, and so there's no reason for jealousy. If we understood the grace of God, we would better handle such things.

The Sadducees certainly didn't understand the grace of God. And the fact is there is something of the Sadducees in the best of us. Men who were self-protective of their own prestige, who sought their own ends, they were filled with jealousy; and that provoked action. They arrested all the apostles and put them in jail for the night.

Then in the morning when the Sanhedrin assembled – the Sanhedrin you'll remember is the high court, the supreme court of Israel – when it came together in the morning and prepared the whole court, they sent for them. But the apostles were not to be found. The prison door was locked, the guards were stationed in front of it, but the prisoners weren't inside. They'd made a supernatural escape. In the night, an angel had come, opened the prison door without the guards noticing.

We don't know how that happened; it's not explained. But it happened in that way. They did not notice that the doors had been opened. He freed the apostles and gave them the order to go to the temple and preach to the people, which they did.

Now the irony in this is obvious when we understand the theology and the philosophy of the Sadducees. It's given in Acts 23:8 where Luke explains that they were naturalists; they were materialists. They were like the modern-day liberal. They didn't believe in the supernatural. They rejected the doctrine of the resurrection. Didn't believe in angels; didn't believe in spirits. And now after trying and failing to cover up the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they're apostolic prisoners are released by an angel.

Dr. Johnson had a statement – I think I'm getting it right – that, "God has a way of overthrowing us in the very place where we think we are wisest." That's true. He did that here with the Sadducees; but he does that to the unbeliever with the gospel every day. It is the foolishness of the cross that is the power of salvation.

That's what the Bible teaches. That's 1 Corinthians 1:18; that's Romans 1:16. It is the power of God unto salvation. The world rejects it as foolish; and, yet, through that foolishness, many men are brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Their lives are turned upside-down; they're made into new creatures. And here, God attacks the Sadducees' philosophy by supernaturally intervening to release his apostles by an angel who then tells them to, "Go preach the whole message of this life."

The message of this life is the good news of salvation in Christ. He called himself the Bread of Life. He called himself the way, and the truth, and the life. Can you imagine anyone saying that? Can you imagine me standing before you and

saying, "I am the bread of life. I am the way, and the truth, and the life." And he made many such statement as that. This is no mere man; they are testimonies to his deity.

In fact, in John 17:3, he defines eternal life in terms of knowing him: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent." Eternal life is in him, he says. Now, no mere man could say that. Christ is the life because he is God's son. And so to preach the whole message of this life is to preach Christ in his deity. He is the eternal Son of God. It's also to preach him in his humanity because there's no salvation unless Jesus Christ became a man.

Only a man could be the substitute for men. Only a human being could substitute for the human race. And so it took a man to be our substitute, but a man who has a divine nature, the God-man, because it's that divine nature that gives eternal infinite value to his death. And so to preach the whole message of this life is to preach that. It's to preach Christ. It's to preach Christ in his deity, in his humanity. It's to preach his sacrifice; it's to preach his resurrection; it's to preach man's sin and man's need of a Savior.

Christ did not come to merely be a good example, he came to seek and save that which is lost, and he accomplished that at the cross; so we much each sin. It's a message of Christ's crucified, resurrected, and ascended. An angel released the apostles so that they could preach that, not so that they could go hide, not so that they could go save their lives, but so that they could put their lives on the line. He sent them into the teeth of danger to preach; and they went without protests, they went without question, and they went and proclaimed the gospel in the temple, confident of their security in the Lord.

There would be other supernatural jailbreaks in the book of Acts. Peter will be delivered again in such a way in chapter 12, and Paul and Silas in chapter 16, which all illustrate that God's work cannot be frustrated. That's the God that we serve. That's the God whom we follow. The Captain of our salvation cannot be thwarted in his work, and so we are to trust him as these apostles did. He can't be frustrated, but the Sadducees and the Pharisees, they were frustrated and very perplexed when they heard their prisoners were gone; couldn't understand that.

But it wasn't long before they learned where they were and sent the temple police to arrest them. No force was used, Luke tells us, and no resistance was made. Had the apostles wanted to, they could have easily stirred up the crowd to come to their defense. But they went peaceably. When they were brought in and stood before the Sanhedrin, the high priest who presided over the court – presumably this is Caiaphas – reminded them of the previous warning that had been given to them. That's found in chapter 4 when they were arrested the first time. And he upbraided them for not obeying it; for ignoring their instruction.

Verse 28: "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". The charge is that they were subverting the court's authority, and yet, the whole preceding was in reality and admission that the court had no real authority over these men. It was powerless to keep Jerusalem from being filled with the name of Christ. They had killed him, but they could not make his name perish; and they were clearly frustrated by that, and disturbed by the charge of guilt that had been laid on them for Christ's death. "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us," he said. Now that, of course, is just what they had invited on themselves when they stood before Pontius Pilate and cried out, "His blood be on us and our children." Now that it was, they recoiled from the consequences and they protest their innocence.

Well, the charge against the apostles call for an answer from them, and Peter spoke on their behalf. His response took the form of a sermon. He begins in verse 29 with a clear statement of principle: "We must obey God rather than men."

And for the Christian, that is the guiding principle of civil disobedience. We are to be good citizens, we are to support our nation and government, and we are to participate in our national life. And many of you do that. Some of you do it every day of the week, or five days a week. That's good; that is proper. Peter himself says in 1 Peter 2:13, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors."

That's God's will for us, to be good citizens, to submit to the authorities that are over us. But when the king and governors make laws that violate the will of God, then we must obey God rather than men. He is our guide. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And when anything contradicts his Word, we must not obey it.

The Bible has a number of examples of that, some case studies. There's the Magi who disobeyed Herod. They came to Jerusalem seeking the newborn King. When Herod heard of this, he was very disturbed. He told them, "Well, when you find him, let me know. I'd like to come worship him as well." And so they went to Bethlehem, and there they found Jesus in manger and they worshipped him. But before going back to Herod, an angel intervened and told them, "Don't go back there, go to your own country," and so they did. They disobeyed the king.

Daniel and his friends disobeyed the laws of Babylon and Persia when they conflicted with their faith. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, and Daniel into a lions den. All of these understood that they were men under authority who must obey God rather than men. And that's what the apostles were doing in proclaiming the name of Christ.

Well having said that, having set forth their principle of conduct, not negating the authority of that supreme court, that Sanhedrin, they recognized their authority and they were good citizens in light of that; but stating that they must first of all obey the highest authority, the Lord God, God Almighty. Having said that, Peter now gives some definition to the one whom Caiaphas contemptuously dismissed as "this man."

It is his second sermon before the Sanhedrin, and in it, he makes three points. First, that Christ has been raised from the dead. Second, that he has been exalted to heaven. And, thirdly, that they were all witnesses to these things. Verse 30: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging him on a cross."

So, again, unaffected by the threat of Caiaphas, Peter brings the charge of guilt against the authorities. The court had arrested the apostles, but the apostles now put the court on trial. By hanging him on a cross, they put Christ to public shame. The law pronounced a curse on a hanged man. Deuteronomy 21:23, "He who is hanged is accursed of God," Moses said.

And that's what the authorities were hoping to prove by the crucifixion; they put Christ to open shame, to public shame as a man hanged on a cross, as a man accursed of God, and they wanted that to be the statement and that to be the conviction of the people to reject him as one cursed of God. And so they rejected him as a criminal and they hung him on a cross as a cursed man. But God reversed their decision and by his power, raised Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him the

greatest honor; he exalted him. So Peter says, "You killed him, but God raised him. You dishonored him, but God vindicated him."

Secondly, God exalted him to his right hand as Prince and Savior. He is Prince because he is of the royal line of David. He is, as Isaiah writes in Isaiah 9:6, "The Prince of Peace, on whose shoulders the government of the world rests."

The word that's used here in verse 31 is the same word that was used earlier back in chapter 3 when Peter called Christ the Prince of Life. It's the same word that's found in Hebrews 2:10 where Jesus is called the Prince, or the Author of their salvation. As Prince, he is the sovereign over the world; he is the King of Kings; he sits at God's right hand.

The book of Acts began with that great event. The apostles stood and they watched from the Mount of Olives as Jesus Christ literally bodily ascended from that Mount heavenward up into a cloud. So they were witnesses of that. He is seated at the right hand of God, the Father in heaven; he is King over this world; and he is head over his church. He is personally ruling over us. He is our spiritual leader, our guide through life. We have a living head, a spiritual guide who literally actually guides us through each step of this world; and he is the source of our life, of eternal life; and so he is our Savior.

They put him to open shame by hanging him on a cross. But it was there on the cross, through that very event, that he accomplished his purpose for the world and made atonement. He satisfied God's justice towards the sinner. He saved us from our sins by dying in our place, taking our punishment as our substitute. That had been the plan from all eternity, and God raised him up from the dead to prove that he had accepted his Son's sacrifice in our place. As a result, he now sits at God's right hand with authority to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Both of those are gifts. Christ gives repentance and faith, and Christ gives forgiveness. That's sovereign grace, and that's what the apostles preached. We find it throughout their sermons. They come back to these great doctrines of the sovereignty of God; and here in this sermon before the Sanhedrin it comes up again. Salvation is of the Lord. It is the work of the triune God. God the Father planned redemption from all eternity, Christ the Son accomplished redemption at Calvary, and the Holy Spirit applies redemption in each generation as he calls his people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Salvation is of the Lord.

H.A. Ironside told the story of a simple man who got up in a meeting and gave a simple but clear testimony of what the Lord had done for him. Then the leader of the meeting who Ironside "quite a legalist" and who was also an Armenian said, "Our brother has told us about God's part, but he forgot to tell his part he was converted. Brother, haven't you something more to tell us about it?"

And the man got back up and he said, "Brethren, I did forget to tell you about my part. I sure did my part. I was doing my part running away from God as fast as I could for 30 years, and God took after me till he ran me down. That was my part." Ironside said, "We do the sinning; he does the saving."

That's what the apostles preached. God saves; we cannot save ourselves. But having said that, we are responsible to obey the message of grace, the message of repentance and forgiveness. It comes from Christ, as Peter says; and what that should do to the sinner is cause him to see his helplessness and turn to the one who gives it; turn to the one who gives the faith that is necessary; turn to the one who gives the forgiveness and seek it from him.

And in his description of Christ, Peter was in effect inviting the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the men of the court to do just that. They had sinned greatly. Caiaphas might want to disown responsibility for the blood of that man, but he was guilty, as were the others. Still, Christ gives forgiveness to all who look to him, even the worst of sinners, and gives forgiveness that is complete and absolute because he is alive. He is the living Prince. He has that authority and he is the living Savior. And the apostles could all testify to that because they were witnesses to it.

That is the third point in verse 32: "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." What Peter preached is a well-authenticated message. The things of which he speaks are not events that took place in a corner somewhere out of the view of the public. These things were all seen, all known. It has the witness of God and men, the apostles and the Holy Spirit.

The apostles are gone today, but the Holy Spirit continues to bear witness through us as we faithfully give testimony to these things, to the truth about Jesus Christ. And as we do that, the Spirit turns unbelieving hearts into believing hearts. He witnesses to the truth of the gospel as we speak it and it enters the mind of the

listener. And as the listener hears it and considers it, the Holy Spirit bears witness to that and produces conviction leading to repentance and faith, leading to obedience.

Obedience is what he gives, but obedience is what is required of us, required of men; and Peter ends his sermon on that note of obedience. The men of the court were to obey. So this is how Peter responds to that which had been said to him. The response was a bold one to the charges that were made by Caiaphas.

But the apostles could do that. They could stand there with courage, they could speak with boldness because they knew they had nothing to fear. They had nothing to fear because Christ is alive. Christ is the Prince and he is the Savior over all. Their courage only made the council furious. They were cut to the quick and intended to kill them, we read, when they found some unexpected help from a member of the Sanhedrin: Gamaliel, a highly respected Pharisee intervened to calm the court with some advice.

One of the interesting features of this chapter is how God twice rescued his apostles. The first time with an angel, and now with one of the council's colleagues. So, again, there are no limits to the way the Lord can deliver us from danger. And we're simply to trust him. We're simply to obey him and leave the outcome to him.

Gamaliel was the grandson of a famous liberal, Rabbi Hillel, and he was a teacher under whom Paul received his rabbinical education. He was also more tolerant than his rival Sadducees. As you probably know, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were rivals with one another, and here, he showed much more tolerance than they; and so stood up and cautioned the council against an impulsive response. He reminded them of personalities and incidents in the past and what had become of them.

He recalled Theudas, a man who raised an army of about 400 soldiers and proclaimed himself to be somebody. Proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, but he was killed and his movement came to nothing. And then there was Judas the Galilean. Same thing happened to him. He was killed and his followers were scattered.

Gamaliel had lived a long life and he'd learned something from all of this; that if God is not in it, it won't succeed. It will all come to nothing, and had seen that in the actions of such men as Theudas and Judas. And so based on that, he counseled the court to take a policy of "wait and see."

Verse 38: "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."

Now his speech has some merit. It's never good to act impulsively in the heat of the moment. It's good to be cautious. And it's always true that it is futile to fight God. He cannot be overthrown. So Gamaliel's advice was good so far as it went, but it really didn't go far enough, and it wasn't all good. It isn't always wise to let an action or movement run its course. And it's true that ultimately God will triumph, and what is of man will fail.

But in the short-term, error spreads rapidly, and it does great damage. We see that in heresy that invades a church. We see that in the popularity of the modern cults and how they increase. It would be unwise; it would be unrighteous to stay away and let them alone as Gamaliel said. So called success, growing numbers, is no measure of God's will. The truth of God is the only measure of what is right, and everything is to be examined in its light.

Now that should have been Gamaliel's advice, to search the Scriptures and see if these things be so. He knew the Scriptures; he was a great teacher of Israel. And he'd not come along just lately, he'd been in Jerusalem for years. He knew about Christ, he knew about his teaching, he knew about his miracles, he knew about all the events leading up to and following the cross, the resurrection, all of that; he knew these things. His advice should have been, "Let's study the Scriptures. Let's consider these things."

Gamaliel had done that. It has been said there might have been another Saul and Paul going throughout the world. Well, maybe. As it was, the world would have to wait a few years for Paul. In the meantime, Gamaliel took the middle road and gave a noncommittal response. He says, "Let's not touch this thing. Maybe it'll just go away of itself."

Council accepted his advice. But rather than just leave it alone and let the apostles go, they first flogged them and then warned them again not to preach Christ. It was intended as a deterrent; but, again, it failed. They went away; their backs bloody, but their hearts full of joy. We read in verse 41: 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 they continued to do just what they had been doing before their trial. And every day in the temple, and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ; and the church kept on growing. Prisons, chains, persecution cannot prevent the church from growing and from the Word spreading.

There's a famous statement that was made by Theodore Beza who was John Calvin's successor in Geneva. Like Calvin, Beza was a Frenchman and was very involved with the struggles of the Protestant church in France. And on one occasion after the Huguenots who were the Protestant Christians there had suffered an injustice. He said to the king, "Sire, it belongs in truth to the church of God to suffer blows, not to strike them. But at the same time, remember that the church is an anvil which has worn out many a hammer."

Sanhedrin is long gone. It was the first hammer to strike the church. The emperors of Rome would strike their blows. The rationalists of the enlightenment attack the church. All were hammers that have struck the anvil, and all were broken. But the church remains, and it will remain to the end because God is in it. It is his great work.

We are the body of Jesus Christ. But it is for us as the body of Christ to be strong in the faith; to know the truth; to grow in the truth, and be obedient to it; to be brave men and women; to trust God and go wherever he sends. "We are to go and speak to the people," as the angel said, "the whole message of this life." That is our task.

Paul would elaborate on that later in chapter 20 where he preached the whole council of God; that's what to be done. And so we must ask ourselves, "How would God have us to do that? Where has he given us opportunities to serve him as his witnesses: at home with your family; at work with your colleagues; at school with your fellow students?"

Has he given you opportunity here as a Sunday school teacher or in some other capacity? We need to pray that the Lord would give us a sense of our task, and a desire to do it, and the courage to obey. He is the one who guides and he gives us no foolish orders. We are never more safe than we are when walking by the Spirit in obedience to the Word.

I like what Spurgeon told his congregation when he said, "You were not created to sit in these pews and listen to me. There is something better for a mortal

man to do than be a hearer only; that's to be a witness." So may God help each of us to do that and be witnesses wherever he leads.

But to be a witness, we must first be a hearer. We must hear the truth; we must know the truth; we must believe and obey the truth. And so I ask you, have you done that?

You've heard the truth; Peter preached it. "Christ is both Prince and Savior." Do you believe it? Have you obeyed it?

Gamaliel heard it, but didn't believe it, didn't obey it. Don't be like him. Wise, though he was, who heard about Jesus Christ crucified, raised, exalted to God's right hand, and having heard that, decided to just leave it alone.

Don't put off obedience. The Bible is clear, "Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may never come. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." May God help you to do that: to respond; to not harden your heart; to do what is truly wise, what is right; and that is to obey the gospel: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And may he help each of us who have, to rejoice in what we have; to be obedient in all things; to be his faithful witnesses wherever we are. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. We thank you for this great example of the apostles, their courage, their boldness, and for what they said, which is a reminder that the triune God rules all things; that our Savior is Prince and Savior. He is seated at your right hand; he is ruling. And there will be attacks upon us, there will be hammer blows against us, but they cannot succeed.

The church of Jesus Christ will prevail against the gates of Hell, not because we're strong. We're not; we're weak, and we have the problems of pride that other men do. We have the problems of cowardice. We don't do what we ought to do; we're not faithful men and women. But you are faithful, and that's why the church will stand and your work will succeed.

So to that end, Father, make us faithful and courageous. And we pray all of these things in Christ's name. Amen.