***Filling Our Jerusalem***

**Summer 2021, Acts 5:12-42 July 25, 2021**

***The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because   
they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.  
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 Christ.*Acts 5:41-42**

**Satan’s counter-attack**

3 *Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit . . . .”*

Acts 5:3

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.*

Acts 5:17

1 *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.*

Acts 6:1

12 *So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”*

Acts 6:12

1) The church should expect Satan’s opposition (remember 1 Peter 4:12-19)

2) The church should expect God to be able to use this opposition for his glory

3) Satan’s attacks are going to help accomplish \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ :

**The “full message of this new life” (the message is more important than the miracle!)**

12 *The apostles performed many miraculous 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 evil 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 the full message of 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 puzzled, wondering what would come of this.*

*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 Having brought the apostles, they made them 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. “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 men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 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 . . . .*

Acts 5

1) The “full message of this new life” is all about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2) The Jewish elders can’t even say the Name (they are the first century elite)

3) Peter’s Jesus is both “Captain” (see Acts 3:15; Hebrews 12:2) and Savior

4) Peter’s gospel is convicting – when was the last time I made someone furious?

**When the right answer isn’t good enough**

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 them: “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.*

Acts 5:34-40

1) While Gamaliel’s restraint is admirable . . . .

2) Gamaliel is nevertheless an example of unbelief masquerading as an open mind

**Back to the beginning**

*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 Christ*.

Acts 5:34-42

1) Rejoicing is an expression of the Spirit’s presence (Galatians 5) and our future (1 Peter 4:13)

2) Suffering is essential to our sanctification (see Philippians 3:10)

3) Our goal is to fill Anacortes with this good news!



**Resources for further studies in Acts**

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at [*https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg*](https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg)

Spurgeon has sermons on this text at [*https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons34.xxx.html*](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons34.xxx.html)and  
[*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0369.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0369.htm)

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle’s essay on conversion in Acts: *https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*[*https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle*](https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle)

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on this text available at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts*](https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts )  
His Acts series is at [*https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts*](https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts)His sermon on this text is at  
[*https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42*](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42)

Tim Keller has a wonderful sermon at [*https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47*](https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47)

John Piper has an interesting take on this passage at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias%20)

I have really appreciated John Stott’s *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce’s work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984).

Carl Trueman’s conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung’s blog at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/)

# Acts Timeline (ESV Study Bible)

# Table Description automatically generated

## The Charge of the Angel

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JULY 8, 1888,

BY C. H. SPURGEON at [*https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons34.xxx.html*](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons34.xxx.html)

"But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." [Acts 5:19](https://www.ccel.org/study/Acts_5:19-5:19),[20](https://www.ccel.org/study/Acts_5:20-5:20).

THE second persecution of the Church, in which all the Apostles were put into the common prison, was mainly brought about by the sect of the Sadducees. These, as you know, were the Broad School, the liberals, the advanced thinkers, the modern-thought people of the day. If you want a bitter sneer, a biting sarcasm, or a cruel action, I commend you to these large-minded gentlemen. They are liberal to everybody, except to those who hold the Truth of God—and for those they have a reserve of concentrated bitterness which far excels wormwood and gall.

They are so liberal to their brother errorists, that they have no tolerance to spare for evangelicals. We are expressly told that "the high priest, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) were filled with indignation." That which had been done deserved their admiration, but received their indignation. Such gentlemen as these can be warm at a very short notice when the doctrine of the Cross is spreading and God the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with signs following. Let them display their indignation, it is according to their nature.

To them the only answer which God gave was spoken by His angel: "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." Argument will be lost upon them—go on with your preaching. They have lost the faculty of believing—go and speak to the people. They are so given over to their doubts, that it is like rolling the stone of Sisyphus to persuade them to faith. They are so eaten up with objections, that to attempt to answer all the questions they raise would be as vain as the labor of filling a bottomless tub. Go on with your preaching, you Apostles—but address yourselves mainly to the people.

Extend as widely as possible the range of the Truth of God, and thus answer the opposition of its adversaries. It is better to evangelize than to controvert. The preaching of the Word of Life is the best antidote to the doctrine of death. Clearly enough, if they had known it and had been capable of seeing it, these blind Sadducees were answered at every point when the Apostles were brought out of prison and bore witness to their Lord.

Here was the creed of the Sadducees—they said that "there was no resurrection, neither angel, nor Spirit." But these Apostles stood up and witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What did they make of that? An angel had come from Heaven and had brought these Apostles out of prison. Then there were angels. As these Apostles were set free while the sentries remained standing before the doors—and those doors were afterwards found fastened—if there were no Spirit, assuredly materialism had acted in a singular fashion.

Every item of their negative creed had been made to fall like Dagon before the ark. The Lord always arranges Red Seas for Pharaohs. All that the Apostles had to do was to go on with their preaching and this they did, for "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

This morning may we be profited while we consider our text and its surroundings. May He who spoke by His angel now speak to our hearts by His Spirit.

I. In reviewing the whole story which we read just now, from the seventeenth verse to the end of the chapter, my first thought is that THE AGENTS EMPLOYED FOR SPREADING THE GOSPEL ARE MEN, AND NOT ANGELS.

The angel of the Lord opened the prison door and set free the preachers, but might not be a preacher himself. He might give the ministers their charge, but he had no charge to preach himself. Surely the angel who brought them out of prison was quite able to have gone and proclaimed the Gospel, and so he might have brought many out of their prison spiritually. But no. It must not be. His commission permits him to say to the Apostles, "Go and speak to the people," but it does not permit him to join in their testimony.

I think that almost with reluctance the angel of the Lord returned to his Master and left the chosen men to go upon their blessed errand. As our Lord took not on Him the nature of angels for man's redemption, so neither does He employ the agency of angels for man's conversion. I feel glad that in the preaching of the Everlasting Gospel angels are not our competitors, at this present time at any rate. "Unto the angels has He not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." They are ministering spirits but they have not received the Holy Spirit anointing them to the ministry of Christ.

This Divine choice of human instrumentality puts honor upon manhood. Those redeemed by the blood of Christ are men and their redemption from sin by power is to be instrumentally accomplished by men. The great fight which began in the Garden of Eden is to be waged by men even to the end. The conquest of the revolted world is to be achieved by men under the leadership of the all-glorious Son of Man. You see your calling, Brethren. I pray you, everyone, to preach the Gospel in your vocation—but specially would I plead for zeal with those whose very vocation it is to preach the Gospel.

What a vocation is ours! What can be more honorable? What more responsible? To rule empires is a trifle compared with speaking to the people all the words of this life. "Lord, what is man, that You are mindful of him? And the son of man, that You visit him?" You make him higher than the angels in this respect, that out of his mouth You have ordained strength because of Your enemies. Such honor have all the saints, for they may all either teach or preach Jesus Christ.

My dear Hearers, you may be yourselves grateful that this ministry is committed to men because it is a condescension to human weakness. Imperfect as human ministers are, we are better preachers to you than angels could be. We cannot sing with their celestial melody, nor charm you with their seraphic eloquence—but we have a sympathy with you which they cannot feel—seeing they are not compassed with infirmities, nor humbled by imperfections. We know your sins, your sorrows, your struggles. We know the roughness of the road you travel—for we, too, came in at the wicket-gate, and have floundered in the Slough of Despond, and scrambled up the Hill Difficulty.

We can have compassion and give direction learned by experience. I suppose an angel would command a very large congregation for a time. But after a while you would feel that there was something alien and distant about the manner of his teaching. You would be awed rather than comforted. A being altogether superior to yourselves would before long drive you to cry for your old minister—with lips of clay and heart of love. You would prefer our feeble pleadings to the more glorious but less brotherly address of an angel from Heaven.

God's use of the ministry of men is honorable to men and it is condescending to men. And surely it is a blow at Satanic pride. The Prince of the power of the air might have felt proud to contend with angels, finding in them foemen worthy of his steel. But when the Arch-enemy sees before him no combatant but a man sent of God, he feels like Goliath when he saw David—a youth and ruddy, approaching him with a sling and a stone. Disdaining such an adversary, I hear him cry, "Am I a dog, that You come to me with staves?"

Yes, Satan, you are no better than a dog and we come against you in the name of Jehovah of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. By humble, truth-speaking, earnest men, the Lord turns the battle and routs the forces of error, that the old Serpent may still feel the foot of the Seed of the woman upon his head. He thought he had made an easy prey of man—but it shall be by man that the enemy shall be driven back to his infernal den with defeat. By man came death and by man came also the resurrection of the dead—which glorious fact is proclaimed by man, to the eternal shame of him that has the power of death, that is, the devil.

To work by men must bring special glory to God. The weaker the instrument, the more honor to the worker. I like to think whatever I may feel driven to believe from Scripture, that the great fight between good and evil will be so fought out that the Lord shall conquer by feeble men even to the end. The omnipotence of God will be glorified in the insignificance of the agents by whom He will achieve the everlasting triumph. Those first Apostles brought all the more glory to God because they came from the fishers' nets, and were called "unlearned and ignorant men."

The weakness which men despised compelled them to confess that the power which they wielded was Divine. The Spirit of God who spoke by them found in them no fancied wisdom to obstruct His impulses. If the Lord will graciously use us poor ministers to the end it will wonderfully illustrate His wisdom and power. Somebody once said that it proved the Divinity of our holy religion that it survived ministers—and there was a good deal of truth in the remark. How I have wondered that this congregation has survived me! And I think we may wonder that as a whole the Gospel survives

its advocates. We are poor tools. I do not refer to you, Brethren from America, but I mean all of us in England, and specially myself.

We are poor tools after all—and if God uses us to save sinners and sanctify saints, He must certainly have all the glory of it. Brethren, the Lord has used us, blessed be His name! He has used us—we should give the lie to manifest facts if we were to deny it. Brethren, the Lord means to use us. He has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

I cannot help adding that the employment of men as soul-winners gives a tender joy to the heart of Jesus. It pleases the Lord Jesus Christ that God should use men—for He Himself is a Man. God, as He is, blessed forever, yet is He most truly Man, delighting in humanity and pleased to see men called to a work of so much glory and honor. He loves to bless men and to see them made a blessing. He delights to see the many Brethren used in their measure in the same way as Himself, the First-born. The Lord Jesus must take great pleasure in the attempts of His servants to seek and to save souls— for they are learning to be shepherds like Himself.

When our King, Edward III, heard that the Black Prince was having a hard battle with the French, he smiled to think that his son was in a place where he could show his valor. When he was entreated to send reinforcements, he re-fused—for he wished his son to have the undivided honors of the day. The Lord Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, puts some of His chosen into places of great peril and He does not seem to send them all the help they could desire—in order that they may prove their faith and consecration and thus earn their spurs.

He takes a brotherly pleasure in the courage and faith which He Himself has worked in them. All the valor of Christ's soldiers is given them by Himself and all that it achieves is to be attributed to Him. He finds joy in seeing them exercise their graces. Like a father delights to see his boy take prize after prize at the University, like a friend delights to see his friend elected to one honorable position after another, so does Jesus rejoice in the honors earned by His servants in the field of service. When we save a soul from death, Jesus, the Savior, rejoices in the deed. When we thus cover a multitude of sins, Jesus, the sin-bearer, sees of the travail of His soul.

The father in the parable was glad when his prodigal son was found—but he would have been more glad still had a brother found him. Our Lord Jesus desires to make us happy with that which makes Himself happy, and so He sends us out to win souls. All these are good reasons why the Lord should employ men and women to spread the Gospel rather than cherubim and seraphim. Dear Friends, do you not think that the angels must often wonder at us? When they see men eager upon politics and negligent of souls, are they not astonished? Do they never say, "We wish the great Lord would let us go and speak to perishing souls. We would speak with all our hearts"?

Do they not sometimes say to one another, "What are these men doing? Do they disdain their high calling? God has given to them the great privilege of preaching and teaching His holy Word but they do not care to do it. They speak as if they were half asleep. Where is their zeal for God, their love to men, their earnestness for Christ"? Brethren, these holy spirits must feel ashamed of us! True, they are our servants and bear us up in their hands, lest we dash our feet against a stone—but must they not sometimes wish that we were stronger on our feet, and were more eager to dash our hands against the enemies of God?

We are carried as invalids, when we ought to be fighting like champions. I charge you by the angels of God who are not permitted to touch this holy work—preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season. Preach with a vigor worthy of the Divine exercise. Preach the Word in some such style as you would expect from those who are bought with the precious blood of Jesus.

So have I spoken to you who are men. As for you, O angel of God, you have opened the prison doors and set free the men of God—but you must now go back to Him that sent you. Bright Spirit, I dare not offer you my pulpit. Feeble as I am, I must do the preaching. Oh, that your Lord and mine may help me and enable me to make full proof of my ministry! Farewell, angel of God, go your way!

II. Secondly, THESE MEN ARE TO TEACH THE PEOPLE. All the words of this life they are to speak.

The manner of their teaching is hinted at—they are to do it promptly, yes, immediately. "Go," says the angel, "go. Do not linger here. Go at once." They did go, so that they were in the temple courts early in the morning. The first beams of the sun that were reflected from the golden roof met their eyes. The first worshippers in those hallowed courts heard the Apostles testifying of Jesus and His love. O dear Servants of God, let us run with the glad tidings. "The King's

business requires haste." The first moment we can get man or woman to listen to us, let us speak the Living Word which we have learned at the feet of Jesus.

They were to make this their primary business. "Go," said the angel, "before anything else—this is your chief employ." I should have been tempted to linger a little just to find out how the angel released the prisoners. He had opened the doors, so we are told, but yet they were found closed and fastened when the officers came and the sentries had not left their posts. Here is a mystery—I should like to clear it up. Are there not many such mysteries? But the command is pressing and peremptory—"Go, speak to the people."

Let me tarry. One does not see angels every day. Let me stay and take in a more complete idea of the heavenly stranger. Indulge me with a little conversation with one who has seen my Lord. There are a great many questions which I would hope have answered. Dear fellow-worker, we perhaps are tempted to study very deeply into mysterious points which do not minister to profit—let us, then, hear the angel say, "Go, speak to the people." Let us keep our thoughts to that Gospel which we are sent to preach. "The words of this life" will furnish ample scope for all our powers. Let us not wander into endless debates which are rather for curiosity than salvation and tend rather to gratify our taste than to accomplish our life-purpose.

The first and chief business of the man of God is, "Go, stand and speak to the people." However simple the speaking, it may be rather talk than oratory. This is our one great business here below. It is clear from the text that they were to take a conspicuous place and speak boldly—"Go, stand in the temple." Go where the Sanhedrim holds its sittings, where the high priest and his Sadducees are on the watch. Let not the danger hinder you. Go where all can see you. Stand up and stand out. Wherever the people are, there let your voices be heard. Be there perseveringly, taking your stand and keeping it till removed by force.

The object was to make the Gospel known. Therefore, let them go to headquarters, let them stand in the chief place of concourse, let them be in the resort of the devout, let them challenge the observation of pilgrims from every corner of the land. Brethren, it is not ours to hide in holes and in corners. Our Gospel is like the sun whose line has gone out through all the earth. Let us not speak timidly for we have not received the spirit of fear, neither will we hide our candle under a bushel. We are to publish the tidings of that life from the dead which has brought life for the dead.

The persons for whom this preaching is designed are mentioned—"Speak into the people." "Unto the people"— that does not mean the poor to the exclusion of the rich, nor the many to the exclusion of the few. The expression is most comprehensive and embraces both the masses and the classes. If the men of the council would hear them, let them speak to them. They did so, alas, with small result. This is a truly Gospel word of command—for the Gospel is glad tidings to all people—and it is to be preached to every creature under Heaven.

A restricted audience is not an evangelistic idea. Go and speak unto the people, then—to all sorts of people—to everybody. Let not a soul escape if you can help it, for your mission is to all mankind. O Gospel fisherman, spread the great net, which will encompass a great multitude of fishes, and with diligence draw it to shore.

If we take the word "people" in its popular sense, it has a lesson to all who teach the Word. Some aim at the intellectual—let us speak to the people all the words of this life. A minister whose congregation numbers about forty all told rejoiced in the smallness of it because he professed that a greater work could be done with a few than with a large number. In answer, a friend suggested that he should infer from that statement that a greater work could be done with no people at all. This reduced the hypothesis to an absurdity.

"I am sure," said one, "that the better a man preaches, the smaller his congregation will become." This shows what a large number of very excellent preachers we have in London. But our business is to reach the people somehow. To obey the text we must, "Go and speak to the people." They need it. Are they not perishing for lack of knowledge? The Gospel is adapted to their needs and capacities—it is simple, suitable, seasonable, saving. The people will receive it. If the poor have the Gospel preached to them they will hear it. God inclines the hearts of the multitude to hearken.

We read of Jesus, that "all the people were very attentive to hear Him." Moreover, the people retain the Truth of God when they receive it. Note this fact in history—the Reformation in Spain was among the nobility and it was the same in Italy—and the work soon subsided. In England the common people received the Truth of God from Wycliffe and it never died out. If you wanted to burn a haystack, you would set it alight at the bottom—and if you want a whole na-

tion to feel the power of the Gospel, it must first be received by laborers and artisans. The martyrs of England were largely taken from weavers and such like.

The people love the man "chosen out of the people." The Bible is their charter, the Gospel is their estate, and when they know it, they will retain it with heroic constancy. What is more, they will spread it. Christ's first preachers were of the people. In the streets of London today and in the Sunday schools of England today, you will find that the people are to the front in holy work. We are glad to see the noble, the great, the rich, the cultured dedicated to our Lord—but, after all, our chief hope lies among the people.

The angel even mentioned the place to which they were to go. "Go, stand in the temple." It was the most public place in all Jerusalem. Therefore, "Go, stand in the temple" rather than in a private house. It was the likeliest place to find attentive hearers. The noise of the sheep market and the bazaar would be absent. Those who came early would probably be among the most devout. "Go, stand in the temple." But when they were bid to stand in the temple it meant that they were to stand in any place and every place where an audience could be gathered.

So they understood it according to the last verse of the chapter—"Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Fellow workers, our business is to speak to the people concerning eternal life—and we must see that we do it. If in this great house so many will gather that the utmost capacity of my voice is used up, this is the place for me to preach in. But if the people will not come here, I must go after them. We must take public halls and assembly rooms. We must even hire theatres and music halls, or stand in the streets—for we must speak to the people.

As men enlightened from on High we must carry the light to the eyes of men. We must carry bread to the hungry and healing to the diseased. If not by one style of speaking, yet by another. We must so speak as to be heard—it is of no use to go on droning to empty pews, or holding forth to bare walls. We must get at the people. This is what the angel bids us do. "Go," said he, "speak to the people all the words of this life."

III. Thirdly, THIS MESSAGE IS DESCRIBED: "Speak to the people all the words of this life." Our teaching, if we are true to Christ, will be not only a doctrine, but a life. The high priest conceived that they preached doctrine. For he said, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Yet it may as truly be called life, as truth. The Christian religion is like Christ—Way, Truth and Life. We have to preach "words of life." Truth which brings life, feeds life and perfects life. We are to preach all the great Truths which concern eternal life.

What are the "words of this life"? If I had to give a short list of them, I should say, the first word of this life is "Jesus Christ." In the forty-second verse we read, "They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Jesus has the words of eternal life. We preach His Deity, His manhood, His offices, His sacrificial death, His resurrection and everything about Him. We preach Christ crucified and if we did not, we should not speak the words of life.

The next word to use would be "atonement." There is no preaching "the words of this life" except we preach the sacrificial death of the Son of God. The Apostles boldly spoke of our Lord's death for they said to the council, "Whom you slew and hanged on a tree." They had mentioned the precious blood—for the high priest said, "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Leave out the satisfaction made by Christ for sin, leave out the doctrine of a real and effective substitution and you have left out of the Gospel "the blood which is the life thereof." "The words of this life" are not preached to the people where the Cross is put in the background.

The next word, to my mind, would be "resurrection." This they preached very fully, saying, "Him has God raised from the dead." The resurrection of Christ secured the justification of Believers and also guaranteed their resurrection from the dead by virtue of their union with Him. If the resurrection were more fully preached at this time, I am positive that it would be a powerful means of conversion.

Nor could the Apostles forget "regeneration." They would echo their Lord's words, "You must be born again." This new birth is possible to you for, "He that sat upon the Throne said, Behold, I make all things new." Leave out the doctrine of the new birth and you have left out one of the cardinal "words of this life."

Then comes "faith." What a word is this! "Without faith it is impossible to please God." "By grace you are saved through faith." He who does not preach justification by faith has not begun to preach "the words of this life." He that believes in Christ has everlasting life—but without faith all is death.

The sixth out of seven words is "indwelling." The Holy Spirit comes into the heart and abides there, working sancti-fication within and producing holiness without. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." And if holiness is not preached as the effect of the indwelling Spirit of God, "all the words of this life" are not spoken to the people.

Then comes the doctrine of the eternal life—that the life given by the Holy Spirit never dies. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." This eternal life is seen here in the perseverance of the saints—it is seen hereafter in their immortality and endless glory. To leave out this would be to leave out the grandest of "the words of this life."

If you desire another outline of the Gospel, I would refer you to Peter's little address to the council. Read at the twenty-ninth verse. Here is the principle of this life: "We ought to obey God rather than men." He who gets this life into him will be under law to God and when that law goes counter to the authority of man, man's law will go to the wall. God is supreme to the man who has this life—he lives as an obedient child of God.

The next great Truth of God mentioned by Peter is the cause of this life. He declared the death of Christ—"Whom you slew and hanged on a tree." That followed by His resurrection—"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus." That followed by His ascension to glory—"Him has God exalted with His right hand." These are historical facts which contain vital doctrines. We must keep on hammering away at this—Jesus died, rose again, and rose to Heaven to make intercession for us. Because of all this, there is life for the sons of men. There is no teaching "all the words of this life" unless these three great facts flame out like the stars of heaven and are made to be essential to our eternal life.

Then comes the manner by which we receive this life, namely, as a free gift. Jesus is exalted "to give repentance." The gift of God is eternal life. Salvation is by Free Grace and Free Grace alone. "This life is never an evolution. Spiritual life does not lie dormant within the dead heart of man. It is an importation from heaven, an implantation by the Spirit. We are quickened by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. Here we have the beginning of this life, namely, repentance, a sense of sin, a turning from it, an abhorrence of it—this is the gift of Jesus and the beginning of the new life.

Then you have the privilege of this life—"forgiveness of sin." He that lives in Christ is set free from the guilt of sin by the righteousness of Christ. Then comes the evidence of this life—"whereof we are witnesses." We speak to you of a life which we have felt. We do not talk to you about an imaginary thing. We speak about a fact which we have observed, no, a fact which we have felt. A far greater witness is the Holy Spirit, who, as He converts and sanctifies men, bears the best possible testimony to the truth and life of the Gospel.

The fruit of this life must also be preached—"whom God has given to them that obey Him." There is no life in Christ apart from obedience to Christ. Obedience is the sure result of our being made to live by the Spirit of God, nor must this ever be forgotten. Thus have I very roughly told you what you are to preach.

IV. But now, fourthly, THE WHOLE OF THE DIVINE MESSAGE MUST BE DELIVERED. "Stand in the temple, and speak unto the people all the words of this life."

Dear Brethren, it is forbidden us to omit any part of the Gospel. I am very glad it is—for if we were permitted, we should sometimes shirk the unpopular parts of it. Yet surely it would be very dangerous to omit any part of the Gospel, would it not? It would be like a physician giving a prescription to a dispenser, and the dispenser omitting one of the ingredients. He might kill the patient by the omission. The worst results follow the keeping back of any doctrine—we may not see those results—but they will follow. Possibly only the next generation will fully display the mischief done by a Truth of God concealed or denied. It would be a dangerous experiment for any one of us to make.

And would it not be presumptuous to leave out a word? If we might take away from the testimony, who among us is wise enough to know what to omit? It is a thousand mercies that we are not left to pick and choose, for this would involve us in responsibilities far too weighty to be borne. It is too responsible a business for us to enter upon. Would not the liberty be injurious to us? Would it not encourage pride? Should we not think ourselves somebody if we were allowed to make a selection of the best parts of the sacred message? Surely, he that judges is greater than that which is judged. We should soon imagine ourselves to be far more nearly infallible than the Holy Scriptures.

Would not this greatly dishonor God? Would it not suggest that God's Gospel is full of superfluities and excrescences, and needs our wisdom to make it perfect? Should we not conclude that the Lord was not so wise as ourselves if He needed our assistance to adapt His Gospel to the occasion? Do you not think it would open a very easy way for another Gospel? If we might omit, we might also add—and I feel sure we should very soon add a great deal which would neutral-

ize and paralyze that of the Gospel which remained. If we felt at liberty to leave out something, we should naturally omit that which is offensive and away would go the tooth and edge of the Gospel.

That which is offensive in the Gospel is just that which is effective. What men oppose is what God uses. If the offense of the Cross had ceased, the power of the Cross would have ceased, also. It is not left to us to cut and carve the doctrine of Christ—we are to preach "all the words of this life."

Have we done so? That is the question. Have we knowingly concealed anything? "Well," says one, "I have not preached all the words of this life to the people but I have preached them to a choice company." But you are told to preach them all to the people. The doctrine of reserve must not be tolerated among Protestants. We must not make that philosophical division which is expressed in those two ugly words, esoteric, and exoteric. This is abolished by the command to preach to the people "all the words of this life." We shall get into no end of mischief and dishonesty if we incline to this practice of the Jesuits.

We want an open Bible for every eye and a plain ministry for every ear. We are to preach "the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth" in fair proportions and to preach this to the people openly. At the present moment there is a great tendency to be obscure upon the true and proper Deity of Christ. I enjoyed the commencement of the prayer just offered by our dear friend, Dr. John Hall. I enjoyed the whole of it but I was greatly touched by his lowly adoration of our Divine Lord.

The Broad men will say that Jesus is Divine but they do not mean that He is God. They speak of His Divinity but they reject His Godhead. This is juggling with words. I hate deceptive phrases. We believe in the Godhead of Jesus and worship Him as God. Christ Jesus is either God or an impostor—there is no in between the two. He said that He was God, He permitted His disciples to think that He was God. He has left words in Scripture which have made millions believe Him to be God—and he could not have been a good Man if, as a mere man, He had produced such an impression and had taken no pains to remove it.

There is also a sad tendency to becloud the truth of man's Fall and Depravity. If you do not preach man's ruin, you cannot preach "all the words of this life." You must be clear about his spiritual death, or you will never be right about his quickening into spiritual life. Unless you preach the terrible doom of the wicked you will never see the greatness of the salvation which comes to us by our Lord Jesus, who has "the words of eternal life."

The work of the Holy Spirit is left too much in the rear by many preachers. Have we not heard of late that certain children do not need to be converted, that the Divine life is in them at their birth? Have they not preached education rather than regeneration, evolution rather than conversion? This is not speaking "all the words of this life." It is telling "old wives' fables."

Brethren, have we not also a few about us who will not bear "all the words"? If you preach holiness as the fruits of the new life, they say you are legal. Verily, the results of this life are among the most important of the words which must be spoken to the people. Grace which does not make us hate sin is false grace. We must preach repentance from dead works and faith which works by love and the people must be told that Christ has not come to save men in their sin but from their sin. On this we will be clear as the sun at noon.

If there is any other point of the Truth of God which is kept back, let us bring it the more forward. Let us insist doubly upon that which others neglect. It needs that the whole Gospel be brought before the people, that they may know it and feel its power. It will involve you in strife and struggle if you resolve on delivering an all-round Gospel—but fear not, the Lord will help you, even He who says to you by His angel—"Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life."

I have done when I have asked what we are doing about this. We who are God's people—what are we doing in this matter? Some of us are preaching—are we preaching the whole Gospel? Has any doctrine been withheld? Let us bring forth things new and old and keep back nothing. Let us put every stone into the arch, lest our building come to nothing. Have we also preached these Truths as words of life? Have we felt the life in them? Have we expected life to come by them? Our preaching will be very much what we believe it will be. If we do not believe that God is going to bless it, He is not likely to bless it. If we do not expect to see life created by the living Word, we shall preach dead sermons to dead ears.

Have we preached as witnesses? Complaint is made sometimes of a preacher that he says too much about his own experience. I do not believe that he can do so, for our experience is our witness-bearing. You can be egotistical and say that

which is to your own credit, and this is censurable. Bt you can also be happily egoistical, and say that which is to God's glory, and that is commendable. You may lawfully say, "This is true. I have proved it!" This is one great reason why God uses men instead of angels to speak the Gospel, because men can support their message by their experience, and angels cannot.

But, beloved Friends, are there not some of you who never tell anybody "the words of this life"? In such a congregation ought it to be possible to put your finger upon a single regenerated man or woman who has never for a whole lifetime spoken to another about the things of God? Are such persons regenerated? I will not come round and mark you. But, alas, some of you have never even confessed your faith in Christ. If you have not obeyed that important command for yourselves, you are not likely to have done much for the souls of others.

But having joined the Church of God, are any of you satisfied to be silent? Are you content to let those around you sink to Hell? What? Never tell of Christ's love? What? Never speak of salvation to your own children and servants? Can this be right? In God's name, wake up! What are you left on this earth for? If there is nothing for you to do, why are you in this sinful world? You ought to be hurried off to Heaven, where you might praise God. No, no, I am afraid I am mistaken. You could not praise God in Heaven—you have not learned how. You could not join in the song of the redeemed for you have never had a rehearsal. Begin, begin, begin at once to praise Jesus in the ears of someone. Tell of Jesus and His love to sinners on earth, or how will you be able to make it known to angels, and principalities, and powers?

Could not some of you do more than you are doing? Are there not young men who might preach in a street corner or at a cottage meeting? Some of our evangelistic societies flag for want of preachers. It ought not to be the case. What are you doing? If you could not preach to men and women, could you not teach the children? Very many Sunday schools in this region are straitened dreadfully for want of teachers. I could tell you of Ragged schools on Sunday evenings where multitudes of children are turned away because there are no teachers.

What are you doing? You confess that you are not your own but bought with a price by the Lord Jesus—why, then, do you not serve Him? I have succeeded to a large degree in routing some of you out—I miss you on Sunday evenings— and a good miss too, since I know where you are and that you are out serving God. You take your meal in the morning and then you feed others in the after part of the day. The Lord bless you in it. You were not created to sit in these pews and listen to me—there is something better for a mortal man to do than to be a hearer only.

I charge every Christian man and woman here to listen to what I am about to say. Though I am no angel, I repeat in the name of the Lord Jesus the command of the heavenly messenger—"Go, stand out boldly, and speak unto the people all the words of this life." And may God bless you. Amen.

# The First Sermon in the Tabernacle

A Sermon [(No. 369)](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/c07.htm)  
Delivered on Monday Afternoon, March 25th, 1861 by the  
Rev. C. H. SPURGEON at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0369.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0369.htm)

"And daily in the temple, and in every house,   
they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."—Acts 5:42.

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Description automatically generatedDO not know whether there are any persons here present who can contrive to put themselves into my present position, and to feel my present feelings. If they can effect that, they will give me credit for meaning what I say, when I declare that I feel totally unable to preach. And, indeed, I think I shall scarcely attempt a sermon, but rather give a sort of declaration of the truths from which future sermons shall be made. I will give you bullion rather than coin; the block from the quarry, and not the statue from the chisel. It appears that the one subject upon which men preached in the apostolic age was *Jesus Christ.* The tendency of man, if left alone, is continually to go further and further from God, and the Church of God itself is no exception to the general rule. For the first few years, during and after the apostolic era, Christ Jesus was preached, but gradually the Church departed from the central point, and began rather to preach ceremonials and church offices than the person of their Lord. So has it been in these modern times: we also have fallen into the same error, at least to a degree, and have gone from preaching Christ to preaching doctrines about Christ, inferences which may be drawn from his life, or definitions which may be gathered from his discourses. We are not content to stand like angels *in* the sun; our fancies disturb our rest and must needs fly on the sunbeams, further and further from the glorious source of light. In the days of Paul it was not difficult at once, in one word, to give the sum and substance of the current theology. It was Christ Jesus. Had you asked anyone of those disciples what he believed, he would have replied, "I believe Christ." If you had requested him to show you his Body of Divinity, he would have pointed upward, reminding you that divinity never had but one body, the suffering and crucified human frame of Jesus Christ, who ascended up on high. To them, Christ was not a notion refined, but unsubstantial; not an historical personage who had left only the savour of his character behind, but whose person was dead; to them he was not a set of ideas, not a creed, nor an incarnation of an abstract theory; but he was a person, one whom some of them had seen, whose hands they had handled, nay, one of whose flesh they had all been made to eat, and of whose blood they had spiritually been made to drink. Christ was substance to them, I fear he is too often but shadow to us. He was a reality to their minds; to us—though, perhaps, we would scarcely allow it in so many words—rather a myth than a man; rather a person who was, than he who was, and is, and is to come—the Almighty.  
I would propose (and O may the Lord grant us grace to carry out that proposition, from which no Christian can dissent), I would propose that the subject of the ministry of this house, as long as this platform shall stand, and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist, although I claim to be rather a Calvinist according to Calvin, than after the modern debased fashion. I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist. You have there (pointing to the baptistery) substantial evidence that I am not ashamed of that ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ; but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply: "It is Jesus Christ." My venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill, has left a body of divinity admirable and excellent in its way; but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself for ever, God helping me, is not his system of divinity or any other human treatise, but Christ Jesus, who is the sum and substance of the gospel; who is in himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.  
This afternoon I will try to describe *the subject, Christ Jesus;* then, secondly, to speak for a little while upon its *comprehensiveness;* then to enlarge upon sundry of *its excellencies;* and conclude by testing *its power.*  
I. First, then, the SUBJECT.  
They continued both to teach and preach *Jesus Christ.* To preach Jesus Christ aright we must preach him in his *infinite and indisputable Godhead.* We may be attacked by philosophers, who will either make him no God at all, or one constituted temporarily and, I must add, absurdly a God for a season. We shall have at once upon us those who view Christ as a prophet, as a great man, as an admirable exemplar; we shall be assailed on all sides by those who choose rather to draw their divinity from their own addled brains than from the simplicity of Holy Writ; but what mattereth this? We must reiterate again and again the absolute and proper deity of Christ; for without this we are in the position of those described by the prophet:—"Their tacklings are loosed, they could not well strengthen their mast" and soon will our enemies prevail against us, and the prey of a great spoil shall be taken. Take away the divinity of Christ from the gospel, and you have nothing whatever left upon which the anxious soul can rest. Remove the Word who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, and the Jachin and Boaz of the temple are overturned. Without a divine Saviour, your gospel is a rope of sand; a bubble; a something less substantial than a dream. If Christ were not God, he was the basest of impostors. He was either one of two things, very God of very God, or else an arch-deceiver of the souls of men, for he made many of them believe he was God, and brought upon himself the consequences of what they called blasphemy; so that if he were not God, he was the greatest deceiver that ever lived. But God he is; and here, in this house, we must and will adore him. With the multitude of his redeemed we *will* sing:

"Jesus is worthy to receive, Honour and power *divine,*  
And blessings more, than we can give  
Be *Lord* for ever thine."

To preach Christ, however, we must also preach *his true humanity.* We must never make him to be less manlike because he was perfectly divine. I love that hymn of Hart which begins—

"A man there was—a real man, Who once on Calvary died."

*"Real* man!" I think we do not often realize that manhood of Christ; we do not see that he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; feeling, thinking, acting, suffering, doing, just like ourselves—one of our fellows, and only above us because he is "exalted with the oil of gladness above his fellows." We must have a human Christ, and we must have one of real flesh and blood too; not of shadows or filmy fancies. We must have one to whom we can talk, one with whom we can walk, one

"Who in his measure feels afresh What every member bears;"

who is so intimately connected with us in ties of blood, that he is as with us one, the head of the family, first-born among many brethren. I am never more glad than when I am preaching a *personal* Christ. A doctrinal Christ, a practical Christ, or an experimental Christ, as some good men make him to be according to the temper of their minds, I do not feel to be sufficient for the people of God. We want a *personal* Christ. This has been a power to the Romish church—a power which they have used for ill, but always a power; they have had a personal Christ, but then it has either been a baby Christ in his mother's arms, or else a dead Christ upon the cross. They never reached the force of a real full-grown Christ, one who not only lived and suffered, but who died and rose again, and sits at the right hand of God, the Head of the Church, the one ruler of men. Oh! we must bring out more and more clearly each day the real personality of the Redeemer in his complex person. Whatever we fail to preach, we must preach *him.* If we are wrong in many points, if we be but right here, this will save our ministry from the flames; but if we be wrong here, however orthodox we may pretend to be, we cannot be right in the rest unless we think rightly of him.  
But, further, to preach Christ Jesus, it is absolutely necessary we should preach him as *the only mediator between God and man.* Admitting the efficacy of the intercession of living saints for sinners, never for a moment denying that every man is bound to make supplication for all ranks and conditions of men, yet must we have it that the only mediator in the heavens, and the only direct intercessor with God, is the man Christ Jesus. Nay, we must not be content with making him the only mediator; we must set aside all approach to God in any way whatever, except by him. We must not only have him for the priest, but we must have him for the altar, the victim, and the offerer too. We must learn in full the meaning of that precious text—"Christ is all." We must not see a part of the types here and a part there, but all gathered up in him, the one door of heaven, the one crimson way by which our souls approach to God. We must not allow that approaches can be made in human strength, by human learning, or by human effort; but in him and through him, and by him, and in dependence upon him, must all be done between God and man. We have no wings, my brethren, with which to fly to heaven; our journey thither must be on the rounds [rungs] of Jacob's ladder. We cannot approach God by anything we have, or know, or do. Christ crucified, and he alone, must lift us up to God.  
And more, we must preach Christ in the solitariness of his redemption work. We must not permit for a moment the fair white linen of his righteousness to be stained by the patch-work of our filthy rags. We must not submit that the precious blood of his veins should be diluted by any offering of ours co-acting therewith, for our salvation. He hath, by one sacrifice, for ever put away sin. We shall never preach Christ unless we have a real atonement. There be certain people nowadays who are making the atonement, first a sort of compromise, and the next step is to make the atonement a display of what ought to have been, instead of the thing which should have been. Then, next, there are some who make it to be a mere picture, an exhibition, a shadow—a shadow, the substance of which they have not seen. And the day will come, and there are sundry traces of it here and there, in which in some churches the atonement shall be utterly denied, and yet men shall call themselves Christians, while they have broken themselves against the corner-stone of the entire system. I have no kith nor kin, nor friendship, nor Christian amity, with any man whatever who claims to be a Christian and yet denies the atonement. There is a limit to the charity of Christians, and there can be none whatever entertained to the man who is dishonest enough to occupy a Christian pulpit and to deny Christ. It is only in the Christian church that such a thing can be tolerated. I appeal to you. Was there ever known a Buddhist acknowledged in the temple of Buddha who denied the basis doctrine of the sect? Was there ever known a Mahomadan Imaum who was sanctioned in the mosque while he cried down the Prophet? It remains for Christian churches only to have in their midst men who can bear the name of Christian, who can even venture to be Christian teachers, while they slander the Deity of him who is the Christian's God, and speak lightly of the efficacy of his blood who is the Christian's atonement. May this deadly cancer be cut out root and branch; and whatever tearing of the flesh there may be, better cut it out with a jagged knife than suffer to exist because no lancet is to be found to do it daintily. We must have, then, Christ in the efficacy of his precious blood as the only Redeemer of the souls of men, and as the only mediator, who, without assistance of ours, has brought us to God and made reconciliation through his blood.  
Our ministry will scarcely be complete unless we preach *Christ as the only lawgiver and Rabbi of the Church.* When you put it down as a canon of your faith that the church has right and power to decree rites and ceremonies, you have robbed Christ at once of his proper position as the only teacher of the church. Or when you claim the office of controlling other men's consciences by the decree of the church, or the vote of a synod, apart from the authority of Christ, you have taken away from Christ that chair which he occupies in the Christian church, as the teacher in the great Christian school, as the Rabbi, and the only Rabbi, of our faith. God forbid that we should hold a single truth except on his authority. Let not our faith stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. You refer me to the writings of Doctor this and Doctor the other: what are these? The words of Christ, these are truth, and these are wisdom. You bring me authority from the practice of a church three or four centuries removed from the crucifixion as the proof of the existence of a certain ceremony and the righteousness of certain ecclesiastical offices. What is your proof worth? If Christ hath not specially ordained it, and if he hath not commanded his people to obey it, of what value is any rite whatever? We acknowledge Christ as ordaining all things for his church, and presenting that church with a finished code of laws, from which any deviation is a sin, and to which any addition is a high crime. Any church officer who is not ordained of Christ occupies an office which he ought to resign. Any person who practices a ceremony for which he has not scriptural authority should renounce it; and any man who preaches a doctrine for which he has not Christ as his certifier, should not demand for it the faith of men.  
But I fear there are times coming when the minister will not be true to his duty unless he goes further, and preaches Christ as *the sole King of the Church.* There has been a disposition on the part of the state, especially with regard to the Free Church of Scotland, to exercise power and judgement over church decrees. No king, no queen that ever lived, or can live, has any authority whatever over the church of Christ. The church has none to govern and rule over her but her Lord and her King. The church can suffer, but she cannot yield; you may break her confessors alive upon the wheel, but she, in her uprightness, will neither bend nor bow. From the sentence of our church there is no appeal whatever on earth. To the court of heaven a man may appeal if the sentence of the church be wrong, but to Caesar never. Neither the best nor the worst of kings or queens may ever dare to put their finger upon the prerogative of Christ as the head of the church. Up, church of God! If once there be any laws of man passed to govern thee, up, dash them in pieces! Let us each catch up the war cry, and uplift the lion standard of the tribe of Judah; let us challenge the kings of the earth and say, *"Who shall rouse him up?"* The church is queen above all queens, and Christ her only King. None have jurisdiction or power in the church of Christ save Jesus Christ himself. If any of our acts violate the civil laws, we are men and citizens, and we acknowledge the right of a state to govern us as individuals. None of us wish to be less subjects of the realm because we are kings and priests unto God. But as members of Christian churches we maintain that the excommunication of a Christian church can never be reversed by the civil power, or by any state act, nor are its censures to be examined, much less to be removed, mitigated, or even judged. We must have, as Christ's church, a full recognition of his imperial rights, and the day will come when the state will not only tolerate us as a mere society, but admit that as we profess to be the church of Christ, we have a right by that very fact to be self-governing, and never to be interfered with in any sense whatever, so far as our ecclesiastical affairs are concerned.  
Christ must be preached, then, and exalted in all these respects, or else we have not preached a full Christ; but I go one step further. We have not yet mounted to the full height of our ministry unless we learn to preach *Christ as the King of kings.* He has an absolute right to the entire dominion of this world. The Christian minister, as ordained of God to preach, has a perfect right in God's name to preach upon any subject touching the Lord's kingdom, and to rebuke and exhort even the greatest of men. Sometimes I have heard it said, when we have canvassed the acts of an emperor or senator, "These are politics;" but Christ is King of politics as well as theology. "Oh! but"—say they—"what have you to do with what the state does?" Why, just this: that Christ is the head of all states, and while the state has no authority over the church, yet Christ himself is King of kings, and Lord of lords. Oh, that the church would put her diadem upon her head, and take her right position! We are not slaves. The church of God is not a grovelling corporation bound for ever to sit upon a dunghill; never queen was so fair as she, and never robe so rich as the purple which she wears. Arise, O Church! arise, the earth is thine; claim it. Send out thy missionary, not as a petitioner to creep at the feet of princes, but as an ambassador for God to make peace between God and man. Send him out to claim the possession which belongs to thee, and which God has given to thee to be thine for ever and ever, by a right which kings may dispute, but which one day every one of them shall acknowledge.  
The fact is, we must bring *Christ himself* back into camp once more. It is of little use having our true Jerusalem swords, and the shields, and the banners, and the trumpets, and the drums; we want the King himself in the midst of us. More and more of a personal Christ is the great lack of the time. I would not wish for less doctrine, less experience, or less practice, but more of all this put into Christ, and Christ preached as the sum and substance of it all.  
II. But, secondly, I am now to speak, for a short time, upon the COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE SUBJECT which the text announces.  
It is an old and trite saying that the ministers of the gospel may be divided into three kinds—the doctrinal, the experimental, and the practical. The saying is so often repeated that very few would contradict it. But it betrays at once, if it be true, the absence and lack of a something essentially necessary for the church's success. Where is the preacher of *Christ* out of these? I propound this, that if a man be found a preacher of Christ, he is doctrinal, experimental, and practical. The *doctrinal* preacher generally has a limited range. He is useful, exceedingly useful; God constitutes him a barrier against the innovations of the times: he preaches upon his subjects so frequently that he is well versed in them, and becomes one of the armed men about the bed of Solomon. But suppose the doctrinal preacher should have it all his own way, and there should be none others at all, what would be the effect? See it in our Baptist churches about one hundred and fifty years ago. They were all *sound* and sound asleep. Those doctrines had preached them into a lethargy, and had is not been for some few who started up and proposed the missions for the heathen, and who found but little sympathy at first, the church would have been utterly inactive. Now, I would not be hard with any, but there are some brethren still whose preaching might justly be summed up as being doctrinal, nothing more than doctrinal, and what is the effect of their ministry? Bitterness. They learn to contend not only earnestly for the faith, but savagely for it. Certainly we admire their earnestness, and we thank God for their soundness, but we wish there were mingled with their doctrine a somewhat else which might tone down their severity and make them seek rather the unity and fellowship of the saints than the division and discord which they labour to create.  
Again, I will refer you to the next class of preachers, the *experimental.* How delightful it is to sit under an experimental preacher! Perhaps of all ministries this one is the most useful, he who preaches the doubts, the fears, the joys, the ecstasies of the people of God. How often do the saints see the footsteps of the flock, and then they find the shepherd under an experimental minister! But do you know the effect of an experimental minister, purely so, I mean, when all else is put aside to make room for experience? There is one school of divines always preaching the corruption of the human heart. This is their style; *"Except thou be flayed alive by the law; except thou art daily feeling the utter rottenness of thine heart; except than art a stranger to full assurance, and dost always doubt and fear; except thou abidest on the dunghill and dost scrape thyself with a potsherd, thou art no child of God."* Who told you that? This has been the preaching of some experimental preachers, and the effect has been just this. Men have come to think the deformities of God's people to be their beauty. They are like certain courtiers of the reign of Richard III, who is said by history to have had a hump upon his back and his admirers stuffed their backs that they might have a graceful hump too. And there be many who, because a minister preaches of doubts and fears, feel they must doubt and fear too; and then that which is both uncomfortable to themselves and dishonouring to God comes to be the very mark of God's people. This is the tendency of experimental preaching, however judiciously managed, when ministers harp on that string and on that alone; the tendency is either to preach the people into a soft and savoury state, in which there is not a bit of manliness or might, or else into that dead and rotten state in which corruption outswells communion, and the savour is not the perfume of the king's ointments, but the stench of a corrupt and filthy heart.  
Take also the *practical* preacher; who would say a word against this good man? He stirs the people up, excites the children of God to holy duties, promotes every excellent object, and is in his way an admirable supplement to the two other kinds of ministers. But sit under she practical preacher; sit under him all the year round and listen to his people as they come out. There is one who says, *"the same thing over again—Do, do, do, nothing but do."* There is a poor sinner yonder just gone down the front steps. Follow him, "Oh," says he, "I came here to find out what *Christ* could do for me, and I have only been told what *I* must do for myself" Now this it a great evil, and persons who sit under such a ministry become lean, starvelling things. I would that practical preachers would listen to our farmers, who always say it is better to put the whip in the manger than upon the horse's back. Let them feed the people with food convenient for them, and they will be practical enough; but all practice and no promise, all exhortation and no sound doctrine, will never make the man of God perfect and zealous for good works.  
But what am I driving at in bringing up these three sorts of ministers? Why just this: to show you that there is one minister who can preach all this, without the dangers of any one of the others, but with the excellencies of the whole. And who is he? Why, any man in the world who preaches Christ. If he preaches Christ's person he must preach *doctrine.* If I preach Christ I must preach him as the covenant head of his people, and how far am I then from the doctrine of election? If I preach Christ I must preach the efficacy of his blood, and how far am I removed then from the great doctrine of an effectual atonement? If I preach Christ I *must* preach the love of his heart, and how can I deny the final perseverance of the saints? If I preach the Lord Jesus as the great Head and King, how far am I removed from divine Sovereignty? Must I not, if I preach Christ personally, preach his doctrines? I believe they are nothing but the natural outgrowth of that great root thought, or root substance rather, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He who will preach Christ fully will never be lax in doctrine. And what better *experience* can you preach than in preaching Christ? Would you preach the sufferings of the saints, preach *his* agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion; for the true sufferings of the saints are in fellowship with him. If you would preach their joys, preach *his* resurrection, his ascension, and his advent; you are never far from the joys of the saints when you are near to the joys of Christ; for did not he say, *"My* joy shall be in them that their joy may be full"? And what better *practice* can be preached than preaching Christ? Of every virtue he is the pattern; of the perfection of human character he is the very mirror; of everything that is holy and of good report, he is the abiding incarnation. He cannot fail, then, to be a good doctrinal, experimental, practical preacher, who preaches Christ. Did you ever know a congregation grow less spiritual by a minister preaching Christ? Did you ever know them get full of doubts and fears by preaching Christ? Did you ever hear of their getting lax in sentiment by his preaching Christ? Did you ever hear a whisper that men became unholy in their lives because they heard too much about Christ? I think that all the excellencies of all ministers may be gathered up into the teaching of the man who can preach Christ every day in the week, while there will not be any of the evils connected with the other forms of preaching.  
III. I shall now pass onto notice some of the surpassing excellencies of the subject  
First, he will always have a *blessed variety* in his preaching. In Australia I have heard that the only change for the backwoodsmen is to have one day damper [unleavened cake baked in wood ashes), tea, and bread; the next day, bread, damper, and tea; and the next day, tea, bread, and damper. The only variety some ministers give, is one Sunday to have depravity, election, and perseverance, and the next Sunday, election, perseverance, and depravity. There are many strings to the harp of the gospel. There are some brethren who are so rightly charmed with five of the strings, which certainly have very rich music in them, that they never meddle with any of the other strings; the cobwebs hang on the rest, while these five are pretty well worn out. It is always pretty much the same thing from the first of January to the last of December. Their organ has very few keys, and upon these they may make a very blessed variety, but I think not a very extensive one. Any man who preaches Christ will ensure variety in his preaching. *He* is all manner of precious perfume, myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. He is all sorts of music, he is everything that is sweet to the ear; he is all manner of fruits; there is not one dainty in him but many. This tree of life bears twelve manner of fruits. He is all manner of raiment; he is golden raiment for beauty, he is the warm raiment for comfort, he is the stout raiment for harness in the day of battle. There are all things in Christ, and he that hath Christ will have as great a variety as there is to be found in the scenery of the world where are no two rocks alike, and no two rivers wind in precisely the same manner, and no two trees grow in precisely the same form. Any other subject you may preach upon till your hearers feel satiety; but with Christ for a subject, you may go on, and on, and on, till the sermon swells into the eternal song, and you begin to sing, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."  
There is yet another excellence about this subject, namely, *that it suits all sorts of people.* Are there rebels present? Preach Christ; it will suit them. Are there pardoned sinners present? What is better, to melt their hearts than the blood of the Lord Jesus. Are there doubting Christians? What can cheer them better than the name of Christ. Are there strong believers? What is stronger meat than Jesus crucified? Are there learned, polite, intellectual hearers? If they are not satisfied with Christ, they ought to be. Are there poor, ignorant, unlettered men? Jesus Christ is just the thing to preach to them—a naked Christ to their simple ears. Jesus Christ is a topic that will keep in all climates. Land in New Zealand in the midst of uncivilised men, move off to another post and stand in the midst of poetical Persia or fickle France, the cross is adapted to all. We need not inquire into the doctrinal opinion of our hearers. If they are high, I am sure Christ will suit them. If they are low, if they be true believers, I am sure Christ Jesus will suit *them.* No Christians will reject such meat as this; only prepare it, and with a hot heart serve it up on the table, and they will be satisfied and feed to the full. So that there is adaptation as well as variety in this subject.  
IV. But more than this, I must add, and this will bring me to my last point, for my time flies—there is a power about this subject when it is preached with the demonstration of the Spirit, which is not found in any other. My brethren, what power there is in this subject to promote *the union* of the people of God! There is a man there, he is almost a Puseyite. "I do not like him," says one. Stop till I tell you something more about him, and you will. There is another man there, a Presbyterian—true blue; he cannot bear Independency, or anything but Presbytery—a covenant man. "Well," says one, "I like him a little better; but I do not suppose we shall get on very well." Stop! I will tell you some more about him. There is another man down there; he is a very strong Calvinist. "Humph," says one, "I shall not admire *him."* Stop, stop! Now, here are these three men; let us hear what they say of each other. If they know nothing of each other except what I have stated, the first time they meet there will be a magnificent quarrel. There is yonder clergyman—he will have little fraternity whatever with the ultra-Evangelical; while the Presbyterian will reject them both, for he abhors black prelacy. But, my dear brethren, all three of you, we of this congregation will approve of you all, and you will approve of one another when I have stated your true character. That man yonder, whom I called almost a Puseyite, was George Herbert. How he loved the doornails of the church! I think he would scarce have had a spider killed that had once crept across the church aisles. He was a thorough churchman, to the very centre of the marrow of his bones; but what a Christian! What a lover of his sweet Lord Jesus! You know that hymn of his which I have so often quoted, and mean to quote a hundred times more: "How sweetly doth my Master's sound," and so forth. I hear a knock at the door. "Who is that?" "Why, it is a very strong churchman." "Do not show him in; I am at prayer; I cannot pray with him." "Oh, but it is George Herbert!" "Oh, let him in, let him in! No man could I pray better with than Mr. Herbert. Walk in, Mr. Herbert; we are right glad to see you; you are our dear companion; your hymns have made us glad."  
But who was that second man, the Presbyterian, who would not have liked George Herbert at all? Why, that was Samuel Rutherford. What a seraphic spirit! What splendid metaphors he uses about his sweet Lord Jesus! He has written all Solomon's Song over without knowing it. He felt and proved it to be divine. The Spirit in him re-dictated the song. Well now, I think, we will introduce Mr. Rutherford and Mr. Herbert together, and I am persuaded when they begin to speak about their Master they will find each other next of kin; and I feel sure that, by this time, Samuel Rutherford and George Herbert have found each other out in heaven, and are sitting side by side. Well, but then we mentioned another; who was that high Calvinist? He was the man who was called the Leviathan of Antinomians. That he was a leviathan I will grant, but that he was an Antinomian is false. It was Dr. Hawker. Now, I am sure, George Herbert would not have liked Dr. Hawker, and I am certain that Dr. Hawker would not have liked George Herbert, and I do not suppose that Samuel Rutherford would have had anything to do with either of them. "No, no," he would say, "your black prelacy I hate." But look at Hawker, there is a sweet spirit; he cannot take up his pen but he dips it in Christ, and begins to write about his Lord at once "Precious Immanuel—precious Jesus." Those words in his morning and evening portions are repeated again and again, and again. I recollect hearing of Mr. Rowland Hill, that he said to a young man who was at tea with him one night when he was about to go:—"Where are you going to?" "Oh!" said he, "I am going to hear Dr. Hawker, at St. George's in the Borough." "Oh, go and hear him," he said; "he is a right good man, worth hearing. But there is this difference between him and me; my preaching is something like a pudding, with here and there a plum; but Dr. Hawker's is all plum." And that was very near the mark, because Dr. Hawker was all Christ. He was constantly preaching of his Master; and even if he gave an invitation to a sinner, it was generally put in this way: "What sayest thou? Wilt thou go with *this man,* and be married and espoused unto *him?* It was the preaching of a personal Christ that made his ministry so full of marrow and fatness.  
My dear friends, let a man stand up and exalt Christ, and we are all agreed. I see before me this afternoon members of all Christian denominations; but if Christ Jesus is not the topic that suits you, why then I think we may question your Christianity. The more Christ is preached, the more will the Church prove, and exhibit, and assert, and maintain her unity; but the less Christ is preached, and the more of Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, the more of strife and division, and the less of true Christian fellowship.  
We will only mention the power of the preaching of Christ *upon the heart of sinners.* There is a person, now a member of my church, whose conversion was owing to the reading of that hymn:

"Jesus, lover of my soul."

"Ah," said he "does Jesus love my soul? Then how vile I have been to neglect him." There are scores whose conversion is distinctly and directly traceable, not to doctrine—though that is often useful—nor experience, nor practice, though these are fruitful, but to the preaching of Christ. I think you will find the most fertile sermons have always been the most Christly sermons. This is a seed which seldom rots under the clod. One may fall upon the stony ground, but it oftener happens that the seed breaks the stone when it falls, and as Christ is a root out of a dry ground, so this finds root for itself even in dry, hard, stony hearts. We ought to preach the law, we ought to thunder out the threatenings of God, but they must never be the main topic. Christ, Christ, Christ, if we would have men converted. Do you want to convince yonder careless one? Tell him the story of the cross. Under God it will arrest his attention and awaken his thoughts. Would you subdue the carnal affections of yonder profligate? Preach the love of Christ, and that new love shall uproot the old. Would you bind up yonder broken heart? Bring forth Christ, for in him there is a cordial for every fear. Christ is preached and we do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice "for he is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth." Judge not, my dear brethren, any man's ministry. The world has too often condemned the man whom God intended to honour. Say not of such an one "He can do no good, for his language is rough and rude." Say not of another that his style is too often marred with flippancy. Say not of a third that he is too erudite or soars too high. Every man in his own order. If that man preach Christ, whether he be Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, we wish him God speed; for God will bless the Christ he preaches, and forgive the error which mingled with his ministry. I must even frankly admit the truth of many a criticism that has been uttered on my ministry, but I know it has been successful, and under God it has been, because I *have* sought to preach Christ. I say that without boasting or egotism, because if I had not done so I had no right so be a minister of Christ at all, and as I claim to be God's minister, I will and must declare it, whatever I have not preached, *I have preached Christ,* and into whatever mistakes I have fallen, I have sought to point to his cross, and say, "Behold the way to God." And if ye see others preaching Christ, be not you their foe. Pray for them; bear them in your arms before God; their errors may yet be outgrown, if they preach Christ; but if not, I care not what their excellency may be, the excellency shall die and expire like sparks that go out in darkness. They have not the fuel of the flame, for they have not Christ Jesus as the substance of their ministry.  
May I entreat, in closing, your earnest prayer, each one of you, that in this house as well as in all the places of worship round about, Christ may evermore be preached, and I may add my own sincere desire that this place may become a hissing and the abode of dragons, and this pulpit be burned with fire, or ever any other gospel be preached here than that which we have received of the holy apostles of God; and of which Jesus Christ himself is the chief corner stone. Let me have your incessant prayers. May God speed every minister of Christ. But where there is so large a field of labour may I claim your earnest and constant intercessions, that where Christ is lifted up, men may be drawn to hear, and afterwards drawn to believe, that they may find Christ the Saviour of our souls. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." "Repent and be converted, every one of you," said Peter. Yet again said Paul to the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." God give us grace to believe, and unto him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

# Popularity, Persecution, and Divine Deliverance (Acts 5:12-42)

### Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42*](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42)

### Introduction[1](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P9_198)

Our God is a saving God, a God of deliverance. The Bible is filled with examples of divine deliverance. When God brought the flood upon the earth to destroy it, He saved Noah and his family, along with a remnant of the creatures that dwell on the earth ([Genesis 6-9](javascript:%7b%7d)). When Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt, God rescued him from bondage and made him a great leader in the land of Egypt, and a savior to his own people ([Genesis 37-50](javascript:%7b%7d)). When the Israelites were held captive as slaves in Egypt, God rescued them and eventually led them into the land of Canaan ([Exodus 1-15](javascript:%7b%7d)). God often delivered David from his enemies, and especially from Saul, who sought to kill him (1 Samuel). We read of many other deliverances in the Book of Psalms. God rescued Jehoshaphat from the Syrians ([1 Kings 22](javascript:%7b%7d)) and also from the Moabites ([2 Kings 3](javascript:%7b%7d)). He rescued Jerusalem from the Assyrians when Sennacherib sent Rabshakeh to destroy Jerusalem and capture Judah (see [Isaiah 36-37](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When we come to [Acts 5](javascript:%7b%7d), we have the account of two great deliverances – the deliverance of the apostles from their incarceration in a Jerusalem jail and from certain death at the hands of the Sanhedrin. This is a fascinating text with many applications for Christians today. Let us look to the Holy Spirit to illuminate this passage to our hearts and minds.

### Our Text in Context

[Acts 1](javascript:%7b%7d) takes us to that 50-day period of time between our Lord’s resurrection and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus revealed Himself to many in very convincing ways, over 40 days ([Acts 1:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d)). Our Lord brushed aside specific questions regarding the timing of His return and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, but commanded that the gospel be taken to the end of the earth ([Acts 1:6-8](javascript:%7b%7d)). After our Lord ascended into heaven, the apostles gathered together to wait, devoting themselves to prayer, and choosing Matthias as the replacement for Judas ([Acts 1:12-26](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The Spirit of God came upon the church, resulting in the gathering of a large crowd, to which Peter proclaimed the gospel. About 3,000 souls were saved that day, and the church began to gather for the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. These new believers were responsive to the financial needs of their brothers and sisters, even to the point of disposing of their own possessions to meet these needs ([Acts 2:42-47](javascript:%7b%7d)).

On their way to the temple for prayer, Peter and John encountered a beggar who had been lame from his mother’s womb. They healed this man in the name of Jesus and preached the gospel to the crowd that gathered in amazement. Peter made it clear in his preaching that Jesus was the promised Messiah, that He had been falsely rejected, accused, convicted, and crucified. He further declared that God had raised Jesus from the dead. To be saved, men must confess their sin and believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah ([Acts 3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This was too much for the Jewish religious leaders, particularly those who were Sadducees. They were the most threatened by the preaching of the apostles. They had played a key role in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, they held the positions of power in Israel, and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. And so they had Peter and John arrested and put in jail overnight, and then brought them to stand trial before the Sanhedrin the next morning. Peter’s confidence and boldness were not shaken by the efforts of the religious leaders of Jerusalem to intimidate him (and the rest who preached Jesus as the risen Messiah). He proclaimed that this lame man was healed in the name of Jesus the Nazarene, whom they had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead. Jesus was the chief corner stone, whom they had rejected, just as the Scriptures had prophesied. Jesus was the One in whom they must believe to be saved and to enter into the promised blessings. There was no way to deny that a great miracle had been performed by the apostles, and there was little the Jewish leaders could do but threaten these apostles and command that they cease preaching in the name of Jesus. Peter and John made it clear they had no intention of following these orders, because they must testify to what they had seen and heard ([Acts 4:1-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When Peter and John were released, they returned to their fellow believers and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. The whole church rejoiced and prayed this prayer:

24 When they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, “Master of all, you who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them, 25 who said by the Holy Spirit through your servant David our forefather, ‘Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot foolish things? 26 The kings of the earth stood together, and the rulers assembled together, against the Lord and against his Christ.’ 27 “For indeed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, 28 to do as much as your power and your plan had decided beforehand would happen. 29 **And now, Lord, pay attention to their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your message with great courage, 30 while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously** ([Acts 4:24-31](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).[2](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P19_6400)

The saints gathered saw this persecution and opposition as the fulfillment of God’s Word, and as the futile efforts of men to thwart the sovereign plans and purposes of God. They prayed for boldness and for God’s attesting signs and wonders, so that God’s message might bring about the salvation of lost men and thus glorify God. Our text in [Acts 5:12-42](javascript:%7b%7d) is clearly the outgrowth of this prayer.

But there is one more piece of the context which is crucial to our understanding of the text before us ([Acts 5:12-5:42](javascript:%7b%7d)), and that is [Acts 4:32](javascript:%7b%7d)—5:11. Luke once again informs us of the care these new believers had for one another. From time to time, as the need arose, they would sell land or houses and give the money to the apostles to minister to those in need. Luke then introduces us to Barnabas, who sold a piece of his property and gave the proceeds to the apostles to distribute. There was one couple in the church – Ananias and Sapphira – who were not as noble as Barnabas. They sold a piece of land, but kept back a portion of the sale price for themselves, and then gave the rest to the apostles *as though it were the total amount of the sale price*. Both died because of their hypocrisy. News of this brought great fear on those who heard, believers and unbelievers alike.

#### The State of the Church [Acts 5:12-16](javascript:%7b%7d)

12 Now many miraculous signs and wonders came about among the people through the hands[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P24_8698) of the apostles. By common consent they were all meeting together in Solomon's Portico. 13 None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high honor. 14 More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number, crowds of both men and women. 15 Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets, and put them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow would fall on some of them. 16 A crowd of people from the towns around Jerusalem also came together, bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits. They were all being healed ([Acts 5:12-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In response to the arrest of Peter and John, the Jerusalem saints had prayed that God would “**extend His hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Jesus**” ([Acts 4:30](javascript:%7b%7d)). This is precisely what God did, as Luke informs us in the verses above. The signs and wonders were incredible, so much so that the people were carrying the sick on cots and pallets, laying them beside the street with the hope that Peter might walk by and his shadow might fall on them.

We might wonder if this was mere superstition on the part of the crowds, perhaps like the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, who waited for the waters to be troubled so that he might plunge in first and be healed.[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P27_10246) Luke gives no indication that these efforts to fall under Peter’s shadow were futile. Instead, he tells us that people from the surrounding towns were bringing their sick and that “***all were being healed***” ([Acts 5:16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

On the one hand, we can see that what is happening through the apostles is strikingly similar to what happened through our Lord:

17 Then he came down with them and stood on a level place. And a large number of his disciples had gathered along with a vast multitude from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, 18 and those who suffered from unclean spirits were cured. 19 The whole crowd was trying to touch him, because power was coming out from him and healing them all ([Luke 6:17-19](javascript:%7b%7d)).

On the other hand, it appears to me that what happens with Peter is an even greater miracle. In the Gospels, people were healed by touching Jesus; in the Book of Acts, people were healed by simply falling under Peter’s shadow. Thus, we appear to have a partial fulfillment of our Lord’s promise to His disciples in [John 14](javascript:%7b%7d):

12 I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, **and will perform greater deeds than these**, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the [Son. 14](javascript:%7b%7d) If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” ([John 14:12-14](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

There is a second aspect to the “state of the church” as Luke describes it in [Acts 5:12-16](javascript:%7b%7d). The church was growing rapidly, in spite of the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira described at the beginning of the chapter:

More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number, crowds of both men and women ([Acts 5:14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The church has been growing rapidly since Pentecost:

So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added. . . . And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved ([Acts 2:41, 47](javascript:%7b%7d)b).

But many of those who had listened to the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand ([Acts 4:4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Now, we are told that crowds of both men and women are continuing to come to faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. And yet this growth is in spite of great fear since the death of Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:5, 11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The unbelieving people of Jerusalem are closer to the truth than their religious leaders. Their leaders cannot refute the miracles Jesus is performing through His apostles, nor can they ignore the association they had with Jesus in His ministry. Yet they will not follow the evidence where it leads. Even the unbelieving masses in Jerusalem and the surrounding cities recognized the power of God at work through the apostles. At the same time, they recognized the holiness of God and His church. They would draw close – close enough for Peter’s shadow to fall on their sick – but they would not associate with the church when it assembled.

#### Jealousy Disguised as Justice [Acts 5:17-28](javascript:%7b%7d)

17 Now the high priest rose up,[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P41_13673) and all those with him (that is, the religious party of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. 18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, led them out, and said, 20 “Go and stand in the temple courts and proclaim to the people all the words of this life.” 21 When they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began teaching. Now when the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they summoned the Sanhedrin – that is, the whole high council of the Israelites – and sent to the jail to have the apostles brought before them. 22 But the officers who came for them did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 “We found the jail locked securely and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” 24 Now when the commander of the temple guard and the chief priests heard this report, they were greatly puzzled concerning it, wondering what this could be. 25 But someone came and reported to them, “Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people!” 26 Then the commander of the temple guard went with the officers and brought the apostles without the use of force (for they were afraid of being stoned by the people). 27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood on us!”

We have just been told that “the people held the apostles in high honor” ([Acts 5:13](javascript:%7b%7d)). Luke uses this expression (“to hold in high honor”) several times. Twice it is used to describe worship toward God:

And Mary said, “My soul **exalts** the Lord” ([Luke 1:46](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

45 The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, 46 for they heard them speaking in tongues and **praising** God. . . ([Acts 10:45-46](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

I am not suggesting that the people’s “high esteem” for the apostles was improper, but only that it was truly high esteem. If there was anything that the Jewish religious leaders who were members of the Sanhedrin wanted, it was this kind of esteem:

2 “**The experts in the law and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat**. 3 Therefore pay attention to what they tell you and do it. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4 They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them. 5 **They do all their deeds to be seen by people**, for they make their phylacteries wide and their tassels long. 6 **They love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues** 7 and elaborate greetings in the marketplaces, and to have people call them ‘Rabbi.’ 8 But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers. 9 And call no one your ‘father’ on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” ([Matthew 23:2-12](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

It would seem that the religious leaders[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P48_17606) could not get beyond their wounded pride to consider the implications of the miracles that were taking place through the hands of the apostles. They were furious. And it was pure jealousy[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P49_17979) that prompted them to have all the apostles arrested and placed in jail overnight. This was the same motivation that prompted them to arrest Jesus and put Him to death:

9 So Pilate asked them, “Do you want me to release the king of the Jews for you?” 10 (**For he knew that the chief priests had handed him over because of envy**.) 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas instead ([Mark 15:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

And so jealousy prompted the members of the Sanhedrin to have the apostles arrested and hauled off to a “**public**”[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P52_18802) jail. It must have looked so simple to the religious elite. They would simply do what they had done before (even though it didn’t work the first time).[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P53_19709) They would arrest the apostles and let them spend the night in jail, pondering their fate. They would then summon for them to appear before the Council, making every effort to terrify them, and thus to silence them. Simply put, they would “turn up the heat” until they re-established their power and prominence among the people.

Things did not go well for the Sanhedrin, however. During the night, an[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P55_20437) angel of the Lord came and rescued them. He opened the doors of the prison and led them out. It would seem that here, as later in Acts,[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P56_20662) the guards were somehow anesthetized, so that they were not conscious or aware of the great escape. The angel gave the apostles very clear instructions:

“Go and stand in the temple courts and proclaim to the people all the words of this life” ([Acts 5:20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

They were to return to the very place where they had been preaching. They were to return to the very same message. They were to proclaim the good news of the gospel to the people, “***all* the words of this life**.” No modifications, no retractions, no change of course – they are to keep doing what they have been doing. Why? Because Luke is showing us that just as Jesus could not be silenced, and His power could not be overcome, so the apostles are invincible in doing the work of the resurrected Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles followed their instructions to the letter. They went to the temple at the break of dawn, at the earliest possible moment. They didn’t wait until late in the day, when no access would be granted, or when no one was present. They went to the temple courts, where all the people would be gathered. And they began teaching, just as they had been doing. It was “business as usual” for the apostles. The people had to take note of this, especially since the arrest of the apostles must have become public knowledge.

All of the events of the previous night – the appearance of the angel of the Lord, the escape of the apostles, their early morning appearance at the temple courts – were unknown to the members of the Sanhedrin. And so they began the morning just as they had planned it the day before. The members of the Sanhedrin were summoned, and next, officers were sent to bring the apostles from jail to stand before them. You can imagine the shock and dismay when the officers return empty-handed with this explanation:

“We found the jail locked securely and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside” ([Acts 5:23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

This was no jail break in the normal sense. The guards had not been overpowered, nor had the gates been forced open. Everything appeared normal. The guards were stationed at their post by the prison doors. The doors were securely locked. But when the doors were opened, the cell was empty.

When the commander of the temple guard and the chief priests heard this report, they were dumbfounded. They wondered where all this was leading. What was next? First, it was the empty tomb of Jesus; now, it is the empty cell. What is going on here? This does not bode well, at least not for those who oppose Jesus and His apostles.

At this moment, someone came with this report:

“Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people!” ([Acts 5:25](javascript:%7b%7d))

The tables have suddenly turned. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin no longer have the upper hand (They never did, but now even they know it!). I am reminded of the time that my roommate in college was looking for a new(er) car. His 1953 Ford coupe was just about worn out. He went to a car dealer friend to look at his used car lot. There he found a 1959 Chevrolet, which he test drove. The salesman made Jerry an offer, which included the trade-in of his 1953 Ford. Jerry was hoping for a better deal and for some time to think about it. He told the salesman that he would think about it and let him know. He got into his old Ford and turned the key. Nothing happened. Jerry stepped out and said to the salesman, “I accept your offer.” When his car would not start, Jerry lost all of his bargaining power. Now, the car salesman had the advantage.

So it was with the members of the Sanhedrin. The commander of the temple guard went with the officers to the temple, where they escorted the apostles back to the Council. Luke is careful to inform us that they did this *without force*, because they were afraid of the people ([Acts 5:26](javascript:%7b%7d)). When the apostles stood before the Sanhedrin, the high priest began to question them. He accused them of disobeying their orders to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. They had not ceased at all; instead, they had succeeded in “**filling Jerusalem with their teaching**” ([Acts 5:27](javascript:%7b%7d)). This is plainly an admission of failure on the part of the Sanhedrin and of success on the part of the apostles.

The apostles were not on the defensive at all, as the high priest backhandedly admitted when he accused them of seeking to bring “**this man’s blood**” on them. If their teaching had filled Jerusalem, then they must have succeeded on all counts.

#### Peter Becomes the Prosecutor [Acts 5:29-32](javascript:%7b%7d)

When threatened earlier by this same body of men, Peter had responded,

“Whether it is right before God to obey you rather than God, you decide, for it is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard” ([Acts 4:19-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

He had given no indication that the threats of the Sanhedrin would change their actions. Indeed, he assured these religious leaders that they would continue to do what they had been doing – bearing witness to what they had seen and heard. Peter’s response on this occasion did not give the members of the Sanhedrin any encouragement either:

29 But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than people. 30 The God of our forefathers raised up Jesus, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these events, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” ([Acts 5:29-32](javascript:%7b%7d)).

While the religious leaders had an exaggerated idea of their own importance and power, the apostles were not impressed. These were mere men, and the apostles were committed to obeying God. When they must make a choice between the two, they would serve God. They would serve the living Christ, whom the Sanhedrin had condemned and put to death. God had overruled them by raising Jesus from the dead, and by making Him both a Prince and a Savior. It was this Jesus alone who could grant repentance and the forgiveness of sins to Israel. The apostles were witnesses of these things, and the Holy Spirit bore witness with them by His acts of power through their hands.

#### Gamaliel to the Rescue [Acts 5:33-40](javascript:%7b%7d)

33 Now when they heard this, they became furious and wanted to execute them. 34 But a Pharisee whose name was Gamaliel, a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up in the council and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. 35 Then he said to the council, “Men of Israel, pay close attention to what you are about to do to these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and nothing came of it. 37 After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census, and incited people to follow him in revolt. He too was killed, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in this case I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, because if this plan or this undertaking originates with people, it will come to nothing, 39 but if it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found fighting against God.” He convinced them, 40 and they summoned the apostles and had them beaten. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them ([Acts 5:33-40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We need to be very clear in our minds as to what is about to take place according to verse 33. We read, “**Now when they heard this, they became *furious* and wanted to execute them**” ([Acts 5:33](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P78_28408) This term, rendered “**furious**” by the NET Bible is found only one other time in the New Testament. Once again, it is Luke who uses it, and in the Book of Acts, just two chapters later: “**When they heard these things, they became *furious* and ground their teeth at him**” ([Acts 7:54](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

In this latter instance, Luke is describing the reaction of the same body – the Sanhedrin. In this case, their fury is in response to the strong accusations of Stephen:

51 “You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, like your ancestors did! 52 Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold long ago the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become! 53 You received the law by decrees given by angels, but you did not obey it” ([Acts 7:51-54](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When we come to [Acts 5:33](javascript:%7b%7d), we are at a point where the members are nearly out of control with rage. They are a heartbeat away from the fate of Stephen, just two chapters later. The members of the Sanhedrin are so enraged they want to kill all of the apostles. Luke leaves no doubt about this. First, he says so in verse 33: They were furious, and they wanted to execute them. Second, we see that they did kill Stephen in chapter 7. Third, Luke tells us that Gamaliel was able to convince them ([Acts 5:39](javascript:%7b%7d)). We then read that they proceeded to beat the apostles. If beating the apostles was giving in to the convincing argument of Gamaliel, then being unconvinced truly must mean death for the apostles.

In our text, Luke introduces Gamaliel to us for the first time in the Book of Acts. He is described as a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, and as one who was respected by all the people ([Acts 5:34](javascript:%7b%7d)). He is more than this however:

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, **educated with strictness under Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors**, and was zealous for God just as all of you are today” ([Acts 22:3](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Gamaliel is a Pharisee, while those who want to kill the apostles are primarily Sadducees (see [Acts 4:1; 5:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). Gamaliel is also Paul’s mentor and teacher. He is a man of great influence.

Gamaliel’s argument is a very simple one, and it is built upon facts that are well known to his colleagues. Gamaliel first sent the apostles from the Council. He did not want them to overhear his appeal, or the discussion that would follow. He wanted to be able to talk freely, and he certainly did. Now Gamaliel will press forward with his argument, with the goal of persuading his colleagues not to execute the apostles.

Gamaliel reminds the Council of their past history in regard to revolutionary groups. Theudas rose up, claiming some kind of greatness or mission, and about 400 men joined with him. But after he was killed, his followers disbanded, and the movement came to nothing. So, too, Judas the Galilean “**arose**”[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P87_31498) in the days of the census and gained a following. But when he was killed, his following, like those who once followed Theudas, quickly scattered, and the movement came to nothing.

Gamaliel now draws a conclusion from these facts and applies it to the apostles of our Lord. The principle he draws might be stated this way: “Movements tend to die with their leaders.” He is not yet finished, however. There is another element in his argument. In cases where the movement does not die with the leader, but flourishes, it is possible that this movement is the work of God. To oppose a movement that is thriving might then be opposing God.

The application of this was obvious to the members of the Sanhedrin. Jesus was the leader, and He had been put to death. Normally, one would expect His followers – the disciples and others – to disband. That had not happened. Indeed, the more time that passed, the greater the boldness of the apostles and the greater the number of new followers. Persecution had done nothing to stop the growth of this movement. Does this not suggest that this movement may be a work of God? If this is the case, better leave it alone, or run the risk of opposing God.

It is interesting that Luke includes the essence of Gamaliel’s argument here for the reader to ponder. A fair amount of space is devoted to it. It must therefore be important in Luke’s mind. What is so important about Gamaliel’s counsel to the Sanhedrin? I think there are several elements.

*First, Gamaliel’s counsel prevailed, and the Sanhedrin gave up its intention to execute the apostles on the spot.* In other words, from a human perspective, Gamaliel’s counsel saved the lives of the apostles. It is clear that they were so furious with the apostles that they intended to kill them ([Acts 5:33](javascript:%7b%7d)). He dissuaded them from doing so, thus sparing the lives of the apostles*.*

*Second, Gamaliel’s counsel not only stops an execution, it supports the gospel.**[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P93_33652)* The more I consider the argument of this prominent scholar, the more it makes sense, and the more it supports the gospel as Luke has been proclaiming it and as the early church practiced it. Gamaliel won because he was right. Jesus was the leader who had been killed, but now they were faced with an empty tomb and with followers (apostles) who were performing signs and wonders, who were preaching with great power, so that the church was rapidly growing. All the evidence pointed to the fact that God was in this, and they had better be careful not to oppose God in their zeal to protect their interests. I am reminded of the words of our Lord, “**You are not far from the kingdom of God**” ([Mark 12:34](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Third, I have to wonder if Luke is not introducing us to Gamaliel in preparation for his later appearance in Acts.* You will remember that Gamaliel played a very significant role in the life of Saul, before his conversion:

1 “Brothers and fathers, listen to my defense that I now make to you.” 2 (When they heard that he was addressing them in Aramaic, they became even quieter.) Then Paul said, 3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, **educated with strictness under Gamaliel** according to the law of our ancestors, and was zealous for God just as all of you are today” ([Acts 22:1-3](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

When I ask Christians how they were brought to faith in Jesus, they almost always respond, “That’s a long story.” They realize that God used many things to bring them to faith, and often over a period of time. We will read of Saul’s conversion three times in the Book of Acts. From what we read in Acts, we know that Paul was born in Tarsus and then brought up in Jerusalem, under the tutelage of Gamaliel, the very same renowned Pharisee we meet in [Acts 5](javascript:%7b%7d). Saul was also present at the stoning of Stephen (see [Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I am inclined to think that Gamaliel’s approach to dealing with Jesus and the apostles must have been conveyed to Saul (soon to be known as Paul). In our text, Gamaliel has said, in effect, “If we cannot silence and scatter the apostles and believers in Jesus, then maybe this is a work of God, and we are fighting against Him.” Saul participates (albeit somewhat passively) in the stoning of Stephen. Then he “advances” to much more direct opposition to Christianity:

9 Of course, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus the Nazarene. 10 And that is what I did in Jerusalem: Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons by the authority I received from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were sentenced to death. 11 I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to force them to blaspheme. Because I was so furiously enraged at them, I went to persecute them even in foreign cities ([Acts 26:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

But it didn’t work! The church continued to grow. And when Saul was on the road to Damascus, he was encountered by the living Christ:

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing out threats to murder the Lord’s disciples, went to the high priest 2 and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, either men or women, he could bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he was going along, approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**” 5 So he said, “**Who are you, Lord?**” He replied, “**I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!** ([Acts 9:1-5](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine)

By His line of questioning, our Lord has made it clear to Saul that he is persecuting Him by persecuting His church. As his teacher, Gamaliel, had said to the Sanhedrin, persecuting the followers of Jesus might just be opposing God. Now, when Saul comes face to face with the risen Lord, he learns that this is precisely what he has been doing. It was not the church that collapsed under persecution, but Saul who collapsed, when confronted by the God he mistakenly assumed he was serving by persecuting the church.

I am therefore suggesting that Gamaliel was actually used of God to promote the gospel, while at the same time he was instrumental in preserving the lives of the apostles. I have to wonder if Gamaliel was there with the Sanhedrin when Paul (the converted Saul) was brought before the Council after his arrest:

30 The next day, because the commanding officer wanted to know the true reason Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and the whole council to assemble. He then brought Paul down and had him stand before them. 1 Paul looked directly at the council and said, “Brothers, I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God to this day.” 2 At that the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit there judging me according to the law, and in violation of the law you order me to be struck?” 4 Those standing near him said, “Do you dare insult God’s high priest?” 5 Paul replied, “I did not realize, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You must not speak evil about a ruler of your people.’” 6 Then when Paul noticed that part of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, he shouted out in the council, “**Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead!” 7 When he said this, an argument began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) 9 There was a great commotion, and some experts in the law from the party of the Pharisees stood up and protested strongly, “We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him**?” ([Acts 22:30](javascript:%7b%7d)—23:9, emphasis mine)

In the Gospels, the Pharisees and the Sadducees conspired together to crucify Jesus. In the Book of Acts, the Pharisees seem to withdraw from opposition to the gospel, and it is the Sadducees who are seeking to stamp out Christianity. And when we come to [Acts 23](javascript:%7b%7d), it appears that the Pharisees and the Sadducees part ways, with the Pharisees actually defending Paul and other Christians. Does Gamaliel not play a significant role in all of this? I have to think so. And perhaps Gamaliel is now present in the Council, defending his former student. Let us hope that he came to know the Savior as Saul (Paul) did.

And so, to get back to our text, Luke informs us that Gamaliel’s reason won the day, and that the Sanhedrin was convinced ([Acts 5:39](javascript:%7b%7d)). This does not mean that they gave up entirely, for they summoned the apostles to return, and after beating them, they once again ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then they released them ([Acts 5:40](javascript:%7b%7d)).

#### Reason to Rejoice [Acts 5:41-42](javascript:%7b%7d)

41 So they left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. 42 And every day both in the temple courts and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus was the Christ ([Acts 5:41-42](javascript:%7b%7d)).

After graduating from college, I taught sixth grade for nearly two-and-a-half years. On one occasion, I found it necessary to send a student to the principal’s office for discipline. The principal was a nice fellow, but he believed in “reasoning” with the offender. After a while, the student returned to my classroom, with a big smile on his face. One of my other students observed this and remarked something to this effect: “How can he come from being disciplined and have such a big smile on his face?”

The Sanhedrin had no intention of sending the apostles away with a smile on their faces. They had hoped to send them away terrified, subdued, and silent. But it did not turn out that way at all. They were rejoicing because God had considered them worthy of suffering for the name of Jesus, the name in which they gathered, in which they performed miracles, and in which they preached. What a remarkable transformation this is from the frightened little band of followers who fled when Jesus was arrested ([Mark 14:50](javascript:%7b%7d)), and who hid after His death (see [John 20:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Now, suffering for being identified with Jesus is not dreaded, but received with joy, as well it should be:

7 But these assets I have come to regard as liabilities because of Christ. 8 More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things – indeed, I regard them as dung! – that I may gain Christ, 9 and be found in him, not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness – a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ’s faithfulness. 10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead ([Philippians 3:7-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

12 Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, who is the Spirit of God, rests on you ([1 Peter 4:12-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

There is a direct relationship between [Acts 5:41](javascript:%7b%7d) and verse 42. When suffering is considered a privilege, then preaching will not cease, even when threatened for persisting to proclaim the good news of the gospel. It is the fear of suffering and death that silences some, but when rightly understood, suffering for the sake of Christ is an incentive for preaching. Luke tells us that the apostles not only left the Sanhedrin with smiles on their faces, but with praise in their hearts. They had been honored to suffer for the name of Jesus. They would not stop preaching in His name and proclaiming the good news that salvation was available only through Jesus.

### Conclusion

As we conclude this lesson, let us consider some of the lessons we should learn from our text.

*First, let us be reminded that our God is a saving, delivering, God.* God delivered the apostles twice in our text. He delivered them from prison by sending the Angel of the Lord to rescue them. He also delivered them from death by the speech of Gamaliel. As we saw at the beginning of this lesson, God has been delivering men throughout the Bible. The greatest act of deliverance was our Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection. There, He died in our place, bearing the penalty for our sins. He was raised to new life, so that those who trust in Him can live new lives by His power, through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Have you experienced this deliverance from sin and its guilt and punishment? If not, trust in Him today. Acknowledge your sins, and your helplessness to live a sinless life. Acknowledge that you deserve God’s eternal punishment, and that Jesus has taken that punishment on your behalf. This is the greatest deliverance of all, and it is for all who believe in Jesus.

1 And although you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest… 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, 5 even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you are saved! – 6 and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them ([Ephesians 2:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Let those who would reject the gospel and persist in their sin heed the warning of Gamaliel. I would paraphrase it this way: “Willful unbelief is not only futile (it won’t work); it is fatal (you are opposing God).

*Second, we see the theme of fulfillment in our text.* The suffering and persecution that the apostles suffer here are precisely what our Lord foretold (see [Matthew 10:16](javascript:%7b%7d)ff.; [John 15:17-23](javascript:%7b%7d)). Also, the message which Peter boldly proclaimed through the power of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of our Lord’s promise as well (see [Matthew 10:19-20](javascript:%7b%7d)). Further, we see the prayers of the early church answered, just as they had asked in [Acts 4:23-30](javascript:%7b%7d). Nothing in our text should take us by surprise. God is faithful to His purposes and His promises, and He answers our prayers.

*Third, we see legitimization throughout our text.* My friend Scott Cunningham called this to my attention. Luke, from the very outset of the Book of Acts, has been showing us how our Lord Jesus is still alive and at work in and through His church. That which our Lord began to do and to teach, the church continues to do and to preach. When we read of the signs and wonders that were performed at the hands of the apostles in [Acts 5:12-16](javascript:%7b%7d), we are reminded of the ministry of our Lord:

17 Then he came down with them and stood on a level place. And a large number of his disciples had gathered along with a vast multitude from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, 18 and those who suffered from unclean spirits were cured. 19 The whole crowd was trying to touch him, because power was coming out from him and healing them all ([Luke 6:17-19](javascript:%7b%7d); see also [Matthew 14:35-36](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 6:54-56](javascript:%7b%7d)).

When we read of the opposition to the apostles by the Jewish religious leaders, prompted by jealousy, we think back to the opposition to our Lord by these same leaders, and for the same reasons:

15 During the feast the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner to the crowd, whomever they wanted. 16 At that time they had in custody a notorious prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. 17 So after they had assembled, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Christ?” 18 (For he knew that they had handed him over because of envy.) ([Matthew 27:15-28](javascript:%7b%7d))

47 So the chief priests and the Pharisees called the council together and said, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many miraculous signs. 48 If we allow him to go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and our nation” ([John 11:47-48](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We should thus not be surprised when we read of this same opposition to Paul, out of jealousy:

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and they began to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him ([Acts 13:45](javascript:%7b%7d)).

But the Jews became jealous, and gathering together some worthless men from the rabble in the marketplace, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They attacked Jason’s house, trying to find Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly ([Acts 17:5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus was put to death and confined to a tomb, and He was divinely released from death and the tomb ([Acts 2:22-36; 3:14-15; 4:8-12; 5:29-32](javascript:%7b%7d)). The apostles are now released from prison ([Acts 5:17-20](javascript:%7b%7d)), as Peter will be in [Acts 12](javascript:%7b%7d), and as Paul and Silas will be in [Acts 16](javascript:%7b%7d). As the religious leaders were unable to silence the powerful teaching of Jesus ([Matthew 21](javascript:%7b%7d), 22), so the religious leaders cannot silence Peter and the apostles ([Acts 5:40-42](javascript:%7b%7d)). Neither can they silence Stephen, except by death ([Acts 6:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d); chapter 7); but even then the gospel was not silenced. In fact, God raised up one of those who opposed the gospel (Saul) to take Stephen’s place. And he could not be silenced either.

Over and over again as we read through Acts, we get that *deja vu* feeling. We have been here before, with Jesus. He *is* alive and at work in His church, through the Holy Spirit. The church will experience what Jesus did, and they will prevail, because Jesus did. Acts is written, in part, to legitimize the apostles – to show that they were divinely appointed and empowered to carry on the work of our Lord.

*Fourth, the deliverance of the apostles was granted so that they could go and proclaim the good news of the gospel.*God saved the apostles for a purpose, so that they could speak of Him to lost men. Those who were divinely delivered were told to go back to the temple and to share the message of salvation. We are saved for a purpose, and that purpose is not simply our freedom. We have been set free so that we can declare to lost men that they may be free from their sin and guilt, by faith in Jesus. As the old hymn put it, “We’re saved, saved to tell others. . . .”

*Fifth, persecution did not silence the apostles, nor did it alter their message.* If persecution does not silence a person, it may affect the message they proclaim. It is not surprising that the Angel of the Lord instructed the apostles to return to the temple, and to proclaim “**all the words of this life**” ([Acts 5:20](javascript:%7b%7d)). The NASB renders this, “**the whole message of this Life**.” There is always the temptation to dilute or alter the message to make it less offensive, or to leave out certain critical elements. The gospel is the “good news” that God offers eternal life to all who believe. It is also the “bad news” that eternal judgment (hell) awaits sinners. We dare not leave out essential elements of the gospel, just to avoid an adverse reaction. Being ready to suffer and even to die for the name of Christ makes one bold.

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we behave with great boldness ([2 Corinthians 3:12](javascript:%7b%7d)).[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P132_52595)

*Sixth, our text is an example of the blindness of unbelief.*How much more evidence is needed to convince the religious leaders that Jesus is the Christ, and that they have greatly sinned by rejecting Him, and by persisting in persecuting the church? Even Gamaliel could see the error of their ways. Unbelief is not due to insufficient evidence; it is due to a hardened heart. One evidence of this hardness of heart is persecution. The Sanhedrin was forced to persecute the apostles, because they could not refute them. We see this with Stephen as well:

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. 9 But some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. 10 Yet they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard this man speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 They incited the people, the elders, and the experts in the law; then they approached Stephen, seized him, and brought him before the council. 13 They brought forward false witnesses who said, “This man does not stop saying things against this holy place and the law. 14 For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us” ([Acts 6:8-14](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Elsewhere Paul tells us that men suppress the truth because of their sin:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, 19 because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. So people are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles ([Romans 1:18-23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

*Seventh, God has divinely delivered His apostles in such a way as to demonstrate His sovereignty, and the invincibility of the gospel.* As I have previously pointed out, God delivered the apostles in two ways: (a) by their supernatural release from prison, and (b) by being spared from death. The first deliverance came about through the Angel of the Lord.[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P138_55496) The second deliverance (from death) was by means of a Pharisee who was a member of the Sanhedrin. The apostles did not accomplish either by an effort on their part. They proclaimed the gospel and left their fate in the hands of God.[17](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P139_55774) They knew that their lives were in God’s hands, and they committed themselves to His keeping. They, like Paul, knew that either life or death would be glorious,[18](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P140_55965) and so they did not frantically seek to avoid persecution or death.

Here is the interesting thing. The Jewish religious leaders first attempted to silence the apostles. This failed. Then (as we see from our text) they were determined to kill the apostles, and this effort was thwarted as well. Later, in [Acts 7](javascript:%7b%7d), they will execute Stephen. While Stephen’s death precipitates a great persecution which scatters the saints, the apostles remain in Jerusalem, preaching Jesus:

And Saul agreed completely with killing him. Now on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and **all except the apostles were forced to scatter** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria ([Acts 8:1](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

Those who sought to silence and to kill the apostles could not silence them, and could not even drive them from Jerusalem. As our Lord said to Paul, “‘**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by kicking against the goads**’” ([Acts 26:14](javascript:%7b%7d)). You can’t win when you oppose God; you can only hurt yourself. Those who love and serve God are invincible. Today we sang a song, a portion of which goes like this:

More secure is no one ever  
Than the loved ones of the Savior[19](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P145_57200)

Nothing could be more true. He who gave His beloved Son to save us will certainly keep us, in life and in death.

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[3](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P24_8699) What here is described as taking place “**through the hands of the apostles**” is understood by the apostles to be the work of God’s hand ([Acts 4:30](javascript:%7b%7d)). The best the Sanhedrin can do is to violently lay hands on the apostles ([Acts 5:18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[4](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P27_10247) See [John 5:1-9](javascript:%7b%7d). In this text, there is no indication that this worked, or that it didn’t. Our Lord’s healing is contrasted with this paralytic’s efforts to obtain a supernatural healing. In [Acts 5](javascript:%7b%7d), Peter heals in the Lord’s name, so it is Jesus who is healing (compare [Acts 3:6; 4:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[5](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P41_13674) I find it fascinating that Luke would choose this term to describe the reaction of the high priest and those with him to the dramatic success of the apostles. It is the same term that Luke uses to refer to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is almost as though Luke is suggesting something like this: “God raised Jesus from the dead; the best the religious leaders can do is to rise up in opposition to the followers of Jesus, the apostles.”

[6](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P48_17607) We should once again take note of the prominence of the Sadducees in their opposition to the apostles ([Acts 5:17](javascript:%7b%7d)), and the relative absence of the Pharisees (except for Gamaliel).

[7](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P49_17980) There is a consistent pattern here. First, the Jewish leaders were jealous of our Lord’s success ([Matthew 27:18](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 15:10](javascript:%7b%7d). Then they were jealous of the apostles’ success, here in our text ([Acts 5:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). Eventually, they will be jealous of Paul ([Acts 13:45; 17:5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

[8](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P52_18803) I have pondered why Luke would include the word “**public**” here, when it was not necessary. What, then, is the significance of the fact that they were taken to a “***public***” jail? Was he stressing the fact that they were having the apostles arrested publicly – in full view of the crowds – in order to intimidate the people? Perhaps. Or, is he informing us that the public aspect of this arrest and incarceration backfired? Just as it was public information that the apostles were under arrest (“They’ve arrested the apostles!”), so their miraculous escape became public when the apostles appeared back at the temple courts, in full public view (“It didn’t work; the apostles are back, doing the same thing they were doing when they were arrested.”).

[9](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P53_19710) This tells us how powerless the religious leaders really were. They could not refute the doctrine (Jesus is alive, and He is the Messiah) nor the practice (healing all who came to them, or them to whom they came). All they could do was use brute force in a futile attempt to silence them. The truth cannot be silenced.

[10](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P55_20438) Or perhaps “**the angel of the Lord**” (KJV, NAB). See the note here in the NET Bible.

[11](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P56_20663) See [Acts 12:5-10](javascript:%7b%7d). Could it have been the same prison from which Peter was once again rescued?

[12](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P78_28409) The NASB reads, “**But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them**” ([Acts 5:33](javascript:%7b%7d), NASB; emphasis mine).

[13](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P87_31499) Once again the term “**arose**” is the same verb used in reference to our Lord’s resurrection. How ironic that these revolutionaries “rose up” in rebellion while our Lord “rose up” from the dead.

[14](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P93_33653) The now deceased Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, makes this observation regarding [Acts 5:39](javascript:%7b%7d): “But if it is of God (ei de ek theou estin). The second alternative is a condition of the first class, determined as fulfilled, ei with the present indicative. By the use of this idiom Gamaliel does put the case more strongly in favor of the apostles than against them. This condition assumes that the thing is so without affirming it to be true.” A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931). Electronic version, as part of BibleWorks.

[15](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P132_52596) The ESV renders, “**Since we have such a hope, we are very bold**.” The NAU renders, “**Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech.**”

[16](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P138_55497) Some would say, “an angel of the Lord.”

[17](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P139_55775) Compare [1 Peter 2:21-23](javascript:%7b%7d).

[18](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P140_55966) See [Philippians 1:19-26](javascript:%7b%7d).

[19](https://bible.org/seriespage/10-popularity-persecution-and-divine-deliverance-acts-512-42" \l "P145_57201) “More Secure Is No One Ever,” words by Lina Sandell Berg, 1832-1903.

### Alexander Maclaren’s commentary on Acts: at [*https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html*](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html)

### WHOM TO OBEY,—ANNAS OR ANGEL?

'Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18. And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20. Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. 21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23. Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. 25. Then came one and told them, saying. Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. 27. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28. Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29. Then 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 ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.'—ACTS v. 17-32.

The Jewish ecclesiastics had been beaten in the first round of the fight, and their attempt to put out the fire had only stirred the blaze. Popular sympathy is fickle, and if the crowd does not shout with the persecutors, it will make heroes and idols of the persecuted. So the Apostles had gained favour by the attempt to silence them, and that led to the second round, part of which is described in this passage.

The first point to note is the mean motives which influenced the high-priest and his adherents. As before, the Sadducees were at the bottom of the assault; for talk about a resurrection was gall and wormwood to them. But Luke alleges a much more contemptible emotion than zeal for supposed truth as the motive for action. The word rendered in the Authorised Version 'indignation,' is indeed literally 'zeal,' but it here means, as the Revised Version has it, nothing nobler than 'jealousy.' 'Who are those ignorant Galileans that they should encroach on the office of us dignified teachers? and what fools the populace must be to listen to them! Our prestige is threatened. If we don't bestir ourselves, our authority will be gone.' A lofty spirit in which to deal with grave movements of opinion, and likely to lead its possessors to discern truth!

The Sanhedrin, no doubt, talked solemnly about the progress of error, and the duty of firmly putting it down, and, like Jehu, said, 'Come, and see our zeal for the Lord'; but it was zeal for greetings in the marketplace, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the other advantages of their position. So it has often been since. The instruments which zeal for truth uses are argument, Scripture, and persuasion. That zeal which betakes itself to threats and force is, at the best, much mingled with the wrath and jealousy of man.

The arrest of the Apostles and their committal to prison was simply for detention, not punishment. The rulers cast their net wider this time, and secured all the Apostles, and, having them safe under lock and key, they went home triumphant, and expecting to deal a decisive blow to-morrow. Then comes one of the great 'buts' of Scripture. Annas and Caiaphas thought that they had scored a success, but an angel upset their calculations. To try to explain the miracle away is hopeless. It is wiser to try to understand it.

The very fact that it did not lead to the Apostles' deliverance, but that the trial and scourging followed next day, just as if it had not happened, which has been alleged as a proof of its uselessness, and inferentially of its falsehood, puts us on the right track. It was not meant for their deliverance, but for their heartening, and for the bracing of all generations of Christians, by showing, at the first conflict with the civil power, that the Lord was with His Church. His strengthening power is operative when no miracle is wrought. If His servants are not delivered, it is not that He lacks angels, but that it is better for them and the Church that they should lie in prison or die at the stake.

The miracle was a transient revelation of a perpetual truth, and has shed light on many a dark dungeon where God's servants have lain rotting. It breathed heroic constancy into the Twelve. How striking and noble was their prompt obedience to the command to resume the perilous work of preaching! As soon as the dawn began to glimmer over Olivet, and the priests were preparing for the morning sacrifice, there were these irrepressible disturbers, whom the officials thought they had shut up safely last night, lifting up their voices again as if nothing had happened. What a picture of dauntless persistence, and what a lesson for us! The moment the pressure is off, we should spring back to our work of witnessing for Christ.

The bewilderment of the Council comes in strong contrast with the unhesitating action of the Apostles. There is a half ludicrous side to it, which Luke does not try to hide. There was the pompous assembling of all the great men at early morning, and their dignified waiting till their underlings brought in the culprits. No doubt, Annas put on his severest air of majesty, and all were prepared to look their sternest for the confusion of the prisoners. The prison, the Temple, and the judgment hall, were all near each other. So there was not long to wait. But, behold! the officers come back alone, and their report shakes the assembly out of its dignity. One sees the astonished underlings coming up to the prison, and finding all in order, the sentries patrolling, the doors fast (so the angel had shut them as well as opened them), and then entering ready to drag out the prisoners, and—finding all silent. Such elaborate guard kept over an empty cage!

It was not the officers' business to offer explanations, and it does not seem that any were asked. One would have thought that the sentries would have been questioned. Herod went the natural way to work, when he had Peter's guards examined and put to death. But Annas and his fellows do not seem to have cared to inquire how the escape had been made. Possibly they suspected a miracle, or perhaps feared that inquiry might reveal sympathisers with the prisoners among their own officials. At any rate, they were bewildered, and lost their heads, wondering what was to come next, and how this thing was to end.

The further news that these obstinate fanatics were at their old work in the Temple again, must have greatly added to the rulers' perplexity, and they must have waited the return of the officers sent off for the second time to fetch the prisoners, with somewhat less dignity than before. The officers felt the pulse of the crowd, and did not venture on force, from wholesome fear for their own skins. An excited mob in the Temple court was not to be trifled with, so persuasion was adopted. The brave Twelve went willingly, for the Sanhedrin had no terrors for them, and by going they secured another opportunity of ringing out their Lord's salvation. Wherever a Christian can witness for Christ, he should be ready to go.

The high-priest discreetly said nothing about the escape. Possibly he had no suspicion of a miracle, but, even if he had, chapter iv. 16 shows that that would not have led to any modification of his hostility. Persecutors, clothed with a little brief authority, are strangely blind to the plainest indications of the truth spoken by their victims. Annas did not know what a question about the escape might bring out, so he took the safer course of charging the Twelve with disobedience to the Sanhedrin's prohibition. How characteristic of all his kind that is! Never mind whether what the martyr says is true or not. He has broken our law, and defied our authority; that is enough. Are we to be chopping logic, and arguing with every ignorant upstart who chooses to vent his heresies? Gag him,—that is easier and more dignified.

A world of self-consequence peeps out in that '*we* straitly charged you,' and a world of contempt peeps out in the avoidance of naming Jesus. 'This name' and 'this man' is the nearest that the proud priest will come to soiling his lips by mentioning Him. He bears unconscious testimony to the Apostles' diligence, and to the popular inclination to them, by charging them with having filled the city with what he contemptuously calls '*your* teaching,' as if it had no other source than their own ignorant notions.

Then the deepest reason for the Sanhedrin's bitterness leaks out in the charge of inciting the mob to take vengeance on them for the death of Jesus. It was true that the Apostles had charged that guilt home on them, but not on them only, but on the whole nation, so that no incitement to revenge lay in the charge. It was true that they had brought 'this man's blood' on the rulers, but only to draw them to repentance, not to hound at them their sharers in the guilt. Had Annas forgot 'His blood be on us, and on our children'? But, when an evil deed is complete, the doers try to shuffle off the responsibility which they were ready to take in the excitement of hurrying to do it. Annas did not trouble himself about divine vengeance; it was the populace whom he feared.

So, in its attempt to browbeat the accused, in its empty airs of authority, in its utter indifference to the truth involved, in its contempt for the preachers and their message, in its brazen denial of responsibility, its dread of the mob, and its disregard of the far-off divine judgment, his bullying speech is a type of how persecutors, from Roman governors down, have hectored their victims.

And Peter's brave answer is, thank God! the type of what thousands of trembling women and meek men have answered. His tone is severer now than on his former appearance. Now he has no courteous recognition of the court's authority. Now he brushes aside all Annas's attempts to impose on him the sanctity of its decrees, and flatly denies that the Council has any more right to command than any other 'men.' They claimed to be depositaries of God's judgments. This revolutionary fisherman sees nothing in them but 'men,' whose commands point one way, while God's point the other. The angel bade them 'speak'; the Council had bid them be dumb. To state the opposition was to determine their duty. Formerly Peter had said 'judge ye' which command it is right to obey. Now, he wraps his refusal in no folds of courtesy, but thrusts the naked 'We must obey God' in the Council's face. That was a great moment in the history of the world and the Church. How much lay in it, as in a seed,—Luther's 'Here I stand, I can do none other. God help me! Amen'; Plymouth Rock, and many a glorious and blood-stained page in the records of martyrdom.

Peter goes on to vindicate his assumption that in disobeying Annas they are obeying God, by reiterating the facts which since Pentecost he had pressed on the national conscience. Israel had slain, and God had exalted, Jesus to His right hand. That was God's verdict on Israel's action. But it was also the ground of hope for Israel; for the exaltatior of Jesus was that He might be 'Prince [or Leader] and Saviour,' and from His exalted hand were shed the gifts of 'repentance and remission of sins,' even of the great sin of slaying Him. These things being so, how could the Apostles be silent? Had not God bid them speak, by their very knowledge of these? They were Christ's witnesses, constituted as such by their personal acquaintance with Him and their having seen Him raised and ascending, and appointed to be such by His own lips, and inspired for their witnessing by the Holy Spirit shed on them at Pentecost. Peter all but reproduces the never-to-be-forgotten words heard by them all in the upper room, 'He shall bear witness of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.' Silence would be treason. So it is still. What were Annas and his bluster to men whom Christ had bidden to speak, and to whom He had given the Spirit of the Father to speak in them?

### OUR CAPTAIN

'Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince.'—ACTS v. 31.

The word rendered 'Prince' is a rather infrequent designation of our Lord in Scripture. It is only employed in all four times—twice in Peter's earlier sermons recorded in this Book of the Acts; and twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In a former discourse of the Apostle's he had spoken of the crime of the Jews in killing 'the Prince of life.' Here he uses the word without any appended epithet. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read once of the 'Captain of Salvation,' and once of the 'Author of Faith.'

Now these three renderings 'Prince,' 'Captain,' 'Author,' seem singularly unlike. But the explanation of their being all substantially equivalent to the original word is not difficult to find. It seems to mean properly a Beginner, or Originator, who takes the lead in anything, and hence the notions of chieftainship and priority are easily deduced from it. Then, very naturally, it comes to mean something very much like *cause*; with only this difference, that it implies that the person who is the Originator is Himself the Possessor of that of which He is the Cause to others. So the two ideas of a Leader, and of a Possessor who imparts, are both included in the word.

My intention in this sermon is to deal with the various forms of this expression, in order to try to bring out the fulness of the notion which Scripture attaches to this leadership of Jesus Christ. He is first of all, generally, as our text sets Him forth, the Leader, absolutely. Then there are the specific aspects, expressed by the other three passages, in which He is set forth as the Leader through death to life; the Leader through suffering to salvation; and the Leader in the path of faith. Let us look, then, at these points in succession.

I. First, we have the general notion of Christ the Leader.

Now I suppose we are all acquainted with the fact that the names 'Joshua' and 'Jesus' are, in the original, one. It is further to be noticed that, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was familiar to Peter's hearers, the word of our text is that employed to describe the office of the military leaders of Israel. It is still further to be observed that, in all the instances in the New Testament, it is employed in immediate connection with the name of Jesus. Now, putting all these things together, remembering to whom Peter was speaking, remembering the familiarity which many of his audience must have had with the Old Testament in its Greek translation, remembering the identity of the two names Joshua and Jesus, it is difficult to avoid the supposition that the expression of our text is coloured by a reference to the bold soldier who successfully led his brethren into the Promised Land. Joshua was the 'Captain of the Lord's host' to lead them to Canaan; the second Joshua is the Captain of the Host of the Lord to lead them to a better rest. Of all the Old Testament heroes perhaps there is none, at first sight, less like the second Joshua than the first was. He is only a rough, plain, prompt, and bold soldier. No prophet was he, no word of wisdom ever fell from his lips, no trace of tenderness was in anything that he did; meekness was alien from his character, he was no sage, he was no saint, but decisive, swift, merciless when necessary, full of resource, sharp and hard as his own sword. And yet a parallel may be drawn.

The second Joshua is the Captain of the Lord's host, as was typified to the first one, in that strange scene outside the walls of Jericho, where the earthly commander, sunk in thought, was brooding upon the hard nut which he had to crack, when suddenly he lifted up his eyes, and beheld a man with a drawn sword. With the instinctive alertness of his profession and character, his immediate question was, 'Art thou for us or for our enemies?' And he got the answer 'No! I am not on thy side, nor on the other side, but thou art on Mine. As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up.'

So Jesus Christ, the 'Strong Son of God,' is set forth by this military emblem as being Himself the first Soldier in the army of God, and the Leader of all the host. We forget far too much the militant character of Jesus Christ. We think of His meekness, His gentleness, His patience, His tenderness, His humility, and we cannot think of these too much, too lovingly, too wonderingly, too adoringly, but we too often forget the strength which underlay the gentleness, and that His life, all gracious as it was, when looked at from the outside, had beneath it a continual conflict, and was in effect the warfare of God against all the evils and the sorrows of humanity. We forget the courage that went to make the gentleness of Jesus, the daring that underlay His lowliness; and it does us good to remember that all the so-called heroic virtues were set forth in supreme form, not in some vulgar type of excellence, such as a conqueror, whom the world recognises, but in that meek King whose weapon was love, yet was wielded with a soldier's hand.

This general thought of Jesus Christ as the first Soldier and Captain of the Lord's army not only opens for us a side of His character which we too often pass by, but it also says something to us as to what our duties ought to be. He stands to us in the relation of General and Commander-in-Chief; then we stand to Him in the relation of private soldiers, whose first duty is unhesitating obedience, and who in doing their Master's will must put forth a bravery far higher than the vulgar courage that is crowned with wreathed laurels on the bloody battlefield, even the bravery that is caught from Him who 'set His face as a flint' to do His work.

Joshua's career has in it a great stumbling-block to many people, in that merciless destruction of the Canaanite sinners, which can only be vindicated by remembering, first, that it was a divine appointment, and that God has the right to punish; and, second, that those old days were under a different law, or at least a less manifestly developed law of loving-kindness and mercy than, thank God! we live in. But whilst we look with wonder on these awful scenes of destruction, may there not lie in them the lesson for us that antagonism and righteous wrath against evil in all its forms is the duty of the soldiers of Christ? There are many causes to-day which to further and fight for is the bounden duty of every Christian, and to further and fight for which will tax all the courage that any of us can muster. Remember that the leadership of Christ is no mere pretty metaphor, but a solemn fact, which brings with it the soldier's responsibilities. When our Centurion says to us, 'Come!' we must come. When He says to us, 'Go!' we must go. When He says to us 'Do this!' we must do it, though heart and flesh should shrink and fail. Unhesitating obedience to His authoritative command will deliver us from many of the miseries of self-will; and brave effort at Christ's side is as much the privilege as the duty of His servants and soldiers.

II. So note, secondly, the Leader through death to life.

Peter, in the sermon which is found in the third chapter of this Book of the Acts, has his mind and heart filled with the astounding fact of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and in the same breath as he gives forth the paradoxical indictment of the Jewish sin, 'You have killed the Prince of Life'—the Leader of Life—he also says, 'And God hath raised Him from the dead.' So that the connection seems to point to the risen and glorified life into which Christ Himself passed, and by passing became capable of imparting it to others. The same idea is here as in Paul's other metaphor: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'—the first sheaf of the harvest, which was carried into the Temple and consecrated to God, and was the pledge and prophecy of the reaping in due season of all the miles of golden grain that waved in the autumn sunshine. 'So,' says Peter, 'He is the Leader of Life, who Himself has passed through the darkness, for "you killed Him"; mystery of mysteries as it is that you should have been able to do it, deeper mystery still that you should have been willing to do it, deepest mystery of all that you did it not when you did it, but that "He became dead and is alive for evermore." You killed the Prince of Life, and God raised Him from the dead.'

He has gone before us. He is 'the first that should rise from the dead.' For, although the partial power of His communicated life did breathe for a moment resuscitation into two dead men and one dead maiden, these shared in no resurrection-life, but only came back again into mortality, and were quickened for a time, but to die at last the common death of all. But Jesus Christ is the first that has gone into the darkness and come back again to live for ever. Across the untrodden wild there is one track marked, and the footprints upon it point both ways—to the darkness and from the darkness. So the dreary waste is not pathless any more. The broad road that all the generations have trodden on their way into the everlasting darkness is left now, and the 'travellers pass by the byway' which Jesus Christ has made by the touch of His risen feet.

Thus, not only does this thought teach us the priority of His resurrection-life, but it also declares to us that Jesus Christ, possessing the risen life, possesses it to impart it. For, as I remarked in my introductory observations, the conception of this word includes not only the idea of a Leader, but that of One who, Himself possessing or experiencing something, gives it to others. All men rise again. Yes, 'but every man in his own order.' There are two principles at work in the resurrection of all men. They are raised on different grounds, and they are raised to different issues. They that are Christ's are brought again from the dead, because the life of Christ is in them; and it is as 'impossible' that they, as that 'He, should be holden of it.' Union with Jesus Christ by simple faith is the means, and the only means revealed to us, whereby men shall be raised from the dead at the last by a resurrection which is anything else than a prolonged death. As for others, 'some shall rise unto shame and everlasting contempt,' rising dead, and dead after they are risen—dead as long as they live. There be two resurrections, whether simultaneous in time or not is of no moment, and all of us must have our part in the one or the other; and faith in Jesus Christ is the only means by which we can take a place in the great army and procession that He leads down into the valley and up to the sunny heights.

If He be the Leader through death unto life, then it is certain that all who follow in His train shall attain to His side and shall share in His glory. The General wears no order which the humblest private in the ranks may not receive likewise, and whomsoever He leads, His leading will not end till He has led them close to His side, if they trust Him. So, calmly, confidently, we may each of us look forward to that dark journey waiting for us all. All our friends will leave us at the tunnel's mouth, but He will go with us through the gloom, and bring us out into the sunny lands on the southern side of the icy white mountains. The Leader of our souls will be our Guide, not only unto death, but far beyond it, into His own life.

III. So, thirdly, note the Leader through suffering to salvation.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is written, 'It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain'—or the Leader—'of their salvation perfect through sufferings.' That expression might seem at first to shut Jesus Christ out from any participation in the thing which He gives. For salvation is His gift, but not that which He Himself possesses and enjoys; but it is to be noticed that in the context of the words which I have quoted, 'glory' is put as substantially synonymous with salvation, and that the whole is suffused with the idea of a long procession, as shown by the phrase, 'bringing many sons.' Of this procession Jesus Christ Himself is the Leader.

So, clearly, the notion in the context now under consideration is that the life of Jesus Christ is the type to which all His servants are to be conformed. He is the Representative Man, who Himself passes through the conditions through which we are to pass, and Himself reaches the glory which, given to us, becomes salvation.

'Christ is perfected through sufferings.' So must we be. Perfected through sufferings? you say. Then did His humanity need perfecting? Yes, and No. There needed nothing to be hewn away from that white marble. There was nothing to be purged by fire out of that pure life. But I suppose that Jesus Christ's human nature needed to be unfolded by life; as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'He learned obedience, though He were a Son, through the things which He suffered.' And fitness for His office of leading us to glory required to be reached through the sufferings which were the condition of our forgiveness and of our acceptance with God. So, whether we regard the word as expressing the agony of suffering in unfolding His humanity, or in fitting Him for His redeeming work, it remains true that He was perfected by His sufferings.

So must we be. Our characters will never reach the refinement, the delicacy, the unworldliness, the dependence upon God, which they require for their completion, unless we have been passed through many a sorrow. There are plants which require a touch of frost to perfect them, and we all need the discipline of a Father's hand. The sorrows that come to us all are far more easily borne when we think that Christ bore them all before us. It is but a blunted sword which sorrow wields against any of us; it was blunted on His armour. It is but a spent ball that strikes us; its force was exhausted upon Him. Sorrow, if we keep close to Him, may become solemn joy, and knit us more thoroughly to Himself. Ah, brother! we can better spare our joys than we can spare our sorrows. Only let us cleave to Him when they fall upon us.

Christ's sufferings led Him to His glory, so will ours if we keep by His side—and only if we do. There is nothing in the mere fact of being tortured and annoyed here on earth, which has in itself any direct and necessary tendency to prepare us for the enjoyment, or to secure to us the possession, of future blessedness. You often hear superficial people saying, 'Oh! he has been very much troubled here, but there will be amends for it hereafter.' Yes; God would wish to make amends for it hereafter, but He cannot do so unless we comply with the conditions. And it needs that we should keep close to Jesus Christ in sorrow, in order that it should work for us 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' The glory will come if the patient endurance has preceded, and has been patience drawn from Jesus.

  'I wondered at the beauteous hours,  
  The slow result of winter showers,  
  You scarce could see the grass for flowers.'

The sorrows that have wounded any man's head like a crown of thorns will be covered with the diadem of Heaven, if they are sorrows borne with Christ.

IV. Lastly, we have Jesus, the Leader in the path of faith.

'The Author of faith,' says the verse in the Epistle to the Hebrews. 'Author' does not cover all the ground, though it does part of it. We must include the other ideas which I have been trying to set forth He is 'Possessor' first and 'Giver' afterwards. For Jesus Christ Himself is both the Pattern and the Inspirer of our faith. It would unduly protract my remarks to dwell adequately upon this; but let me just briefly hint some thoughts connected with it.

Jesus Christ Himself walked by continual faith. His manhood depended upon God, just as ours has to depend upon Jesus. He lived in the continued reception of continual strength from above by reason of His faith, just as our faith is the condition of our reception of His strength. We are sometimes afraid to recognise the fact that the Man Jesus, who is our pattern in all things, is our pattern in this, the most special and peculiarly human aspect of the religious life. But if Christ was not the first of believers, His pattern is wofully defective in its adaptation to our need. Rather let us rejoice in the thought that all that great muster-roll of the heroes of the faith, which the Epistle to the Hebrews has been dealing with, have for their Leader—though, chronologically, He marches in the centre—Jesus Christ, of whose humanity this is the document and proof that He says, in the Prophet's words: 'I will put My trust in Him.'

Remember, too, that the same Jesus who is the Pattern is the Object and the Inspirer of our faith; and that if we fulfil the conditions in the text now under consideration, 'looking off' from all others, stimulating and beautiful as their example may be, sweet and tender as their love may be, and 'looking unto Jesus,' He will be in us, and above us—in us to inspire, and above us to receive and to reward our humble confidence.

So, dear friends, it all comes to this, 'Follow thou Me!' In that commandment all duty is summed, and in obeying it all blessedness and peace are ensured. If we will take Christ for our Captain, He will teach our fingers to fight. If we obey Him we shall not want guidance, and be saved from perplexities born of self-will. If we keep close to Him and turn our eyes to Him, away from all the false and fleeting joys and things of earth, we shall not walk in darkness, howsoever earthly lights may be quenched, but the gloomiest path will be illuminated by His presence, and the roughest made smooth by His bleeding feet that passed along it. If we follow Him, He will lead us down into the dark valley, and up into the blessed sunshine, where participation in His own eternal life and glory will be salvation. If we march in His ranks on earth, then shall we

  'With joy upon our heads arise  
  And meet our Captain in the skies.'

### GAMALIEL'S COUNSEL

'Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: 39. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.'—ACTS v. 38, 39.

The little that is known of Gamaliel seems to indicate just such a man as would be likely to have given the advice in the text. His was a character which, on its good side and by its admirers, would be described as prudent, wise, cautious and calm, tolerant, opposed to fanaticism and violence. His position as president of the Sanhedrin, his long experience, his Rabbinical training, his old age, and his knowledge that the national liberty depended on keeping things quiet, would be very likely to exaggerate such tendencies into what his enemies would describe as worldly shrewdness without a trace of enthusiasm, indifference to truth, and the like.

It is, of course, possible that he bases his counsel of letting the followers of Jesus alone, on the grounds which he adduces, because he knew that reasons more favourable to Christians would have had no weight with the Sanhedrin. Old Church traditions make him out to have been a Christian, and the earliest Christian romance, a very singular book, of which the main object was to blacken the Apostle Paul, roundly asserts that at the date of this advice he was 'secretly our brother,' and that he remained in the Sanhedrin to further Christian views. But there seems not the slightest reason to suppose that. He lived and died a Jew, spared the sight of the destruction of Jerusalem which, according to his own canon in the text, would have proved that the system to which he had given his life was not of God; and the only relic of his wisdom is a prayer against Christian heretics.

It is remarkable that he should have given this advice; but two things occur to account for it. Thus far Christianity had been very emphatically the preaching of the Resurrection, a truth which the Pharisees believed and held as especially theirs in opposition to the Sadducees, and Gamaliel was old and worldly-wise enough to count all as his friends who were the enemies of his enemies. He was not very particular where he looked for allies, and rather shrank from helping Sadducees to punish men whose crime was that they 'preached through Jesus a resurrection from the dead.'

Then the Jewish rulers had a very ticklish part to play. They were afraid of any popular shout which might bring down the avalanche of Roman power on them, and they were nervously anxious to keep things quiet. So Gamaliel did not wish to have any fuss made about 'these men,' lest it should be supposed that another popular revolt was on foot; and he thought that to let them alone was the best way to reduce their importance. Perhaps, too, there was a secret hope in the old man's mind, which he scarcely ventured to look at and dared not speak, that here might be the beginning of a rising which had more promise in it than that abortive one under Theudas. He could not venture to say this, but perhaps it made him chary of voting for repression. He had no objection to let these poor Galileans fling away their lives in storming against the barrier of Rome. If they fail, it is but one more failure. If they succeed, he and his like will say that they have done well. But while the enterprise is too perilous for him to approve or be mixed up in it, he would let it have its chance.

Note that Gamaliel regards the whole movement as the probable germ of an uprising against Rome, as is seen from the parallels that he quotes. It is not as a religious teaching which is true or false, but as a political agitation, that he looks at Christianity.

It is to his credit that he stood calm and curbed the howling of the fanatics round him, and that he was the first and only Jewish authority who counselled abstinence from persecution.

It is interesting to compare him with Gallio, who had a glimpse of the true relation of the civil magistrate to religious opinion. Gamaliel has a glimpse of the truth of the impotence of material force against truth, how it is of a quick and spiritual essence, which cannot be cleaved in pieces with a sword, but lives on in spite of all. But while all this may be true, the advice on the whole is a low and bad one. It rests on false principles; it takes a false view of a man's duty; it is not wholly sincere; and it is one impossible to be carried out. It is singularly in accordance with many of the tendencies of this age, and with modes of thought and counsels of action which are in active operation amongst us to-day, and we may therefore criticise it now.

I. Here is disbelief professing to be 'honest doubt.' Gamaliel professes not to have materials for judging. 'If—if'; was it a time for 'ifs'? What was that Sanhedrin there for, but to try precisely such cases as these?

They had had the works of Christ; miracles which they had investigated and could not disprove; a life which was its own witness; prophecies fulfilled; His own presence before their bar; the Resurrection and the Pentecost.

I am not saying whether these facts were enough to have convinced them, nor even whether the alleged miracles were true. All that I am concerned with is that, so far as we know, neither Gamaliel nor any of his tribe had ever made the slightest attempt to inquire into them, but had, without examination, complacently treated them as lies. All that body of evidence had been absolutely ignored. And now he is, with his 'ifs,' posing as very calm and dispassionate.

So to-day it is fashionable to doubt, to hang up most of the Christian truths in the category of uncertainties.

(*a*) When that is the fashion, we need to be on our guard.

(*b*) If you doubt, have you ever taken the pains to examine?

(*c*) If you doubt, you are bound to go further, and either reach belief or rejection. Doubt is not the permanent condition for a man. The central truth of Christianity is either to be received or rejected.

II. Here is disbelief masquerading as suspension of judgment.

Gamaliel talked as if he did not know, or had not decided in his own mind, whether the disciples' claims for their Master were just or not. But the attitude of impartiality and hesitation was the cover of rooted unbelief. He speaks as if the alternative was that either this 'counsel and work' was 'of man' or 'of God.' But he would have been nearer the truth if he had stated the antithesis—God or devil; a glorious truth or a hell-born lie. If Christ's work was not a revelation from above, it was certainly an emanation from beneath.

We sometimes hear disbelief, in our own days, talking in much the same fashion. Have we never listened to teachers who first of all prove to their own satisfaction that Jesus is a myth, that all the gospel story is unreliable, and all the gospel message a dream, and then turn round and overflow in praise of Him and in admiration of it? Browning's professor in *Christmas Day* first of all reduces 'the pearl of price' to dust and ashes, and then

  'Bids us, when we least expect it,  
  Take back our faith—if it be not just whole,  
  Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it.'

And that is very much the tone of not a few very superior persons to-day. But let us have one thing or the other—a Christ who was what He claimed to be, the Incarnate Word of God, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification; or a Galilean peasant who was either a visionary or an impostor, like Judas of Galilee and Theudas.

III. Here is success turned into a criterion of truth.

It is such, no doubt, in the long run, but not till then, and so till the end it is utterly false to argue that a thing is true because multitudes think it to be so. The very opposite is more nearly true. It in usually minorities who have been right.

Gamaliel laid down an immoral principle, which is only too popular to-day, in relation to religion and to much else.

IV. Here is a selfish neutrality pretending to be judicial calmness.

Even if it were true that success is a criterion, we have to help God to ensure the success of His truth. No doubt, taking sides is very inconvenient to a cool, tolerant man of the world. And it is difficult to be in a party without becoming a partisan. We know all the beauty of mild, tolerant wisdom, and that truth is usually shared between combatants, but the dangers of extremes and exaggeration must be faced, and perhaps these are better than the cool indifference of the eclectic, sitting apart, holding no form of creed, but contemplating all. It is not good for a man to stand aloof when his brethren are fighting.

In every age some great causes which are God's are pressing for decision. In many of them we may be disqualified for taking sides. But feel that you are bound to cast your influence on the side which conscience approves, and bound to settle which side that is, Deborah's fierce curse against Meroz because its people came not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty was deserved.

But the region in which such judicial calmness, which shrinks from taking its side, is most fatal and sadly common, is in regard to our own individual relation to Jesus, and in regard to the establishment of His kingdom among men.

'He that is not with Me is against Me.' Neutrality is opposition. Not to gather with Him is to scatter. Not to choose Him is to reject Him.

Gamaliel had a strange notion of what constituted 'refraining from these men and letting them alone,' and he betrayed his real position and opposition by his final counsel to scourge them, before letting them go. That is what the world's neutrality comes to.

How poor a figure this politic ecclesiastic, mostly anxious not to commit himself, ready to let whoever would risk a struggle with Rome, so that he kept out of the fray and survived to profit by it, cuts beside the disciples, who had chosen their side, had done with 'ifs,' and went away from the Council rejoicing 'that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name'! Who would not rather be Peter or John with their bleeding backs than Gamaliel, sitting soft in his presidential chair, and too cautious to commit himself to an opinion whether the name of Jesus was that of a prophet or a pretender?