A Church that the Lord Will Use (Part 2)

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[0:00] Acts chapter 5, beginning in verse 12.

And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out their sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them.
The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, and that is the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.
But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.
Now when the high priest came and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported.
[1:30] We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside. Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this could come to.

And someone came to them and said, Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple, and they are teaching the people. Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.
And when they had brought them, they set them before the council, and the high priest questioned them, saying, We strictly called you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.
But Peter and the apostles answered, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.
[2:39] But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men.

For before these days, Theodos rose up claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about 400, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him.
He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail.
But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God.
So they took his advice, and when they called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.
Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day in the temple and from the house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that Christ is Jesus.
[3:54] So if you remember from last week, from this text, we see five features of a gospel community.

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And we're seeking to answer the question, how can we experience that same kind of gospel community today? And so the first few we'll do for review, the first couple from last week were, number one, the first feature, they were uncompromising in their beliefs and consistent in their ministry.
So the first feature that I should have had you, that I should have underlined and had you filled in is uncompromising, but I did beliefs in ministry, but they were uncompromising people. So that was the first feature.
They believed what they believed. They practiced what they preached. They were consistent in that ministry. And as a result of that, they were held in high esteem, not just by those within the church, but those who were outside of it, who wouldn't dare join them, but respected that they weren't hypocrites.
The church that wants to experience a gospel culture and reach the lost must be uncompromising when it comes to sin. The second feature that we saw was that they were used mightily by the Holy Spirit.
[5:14] Their uncompromising and consistent position that the church held resulted in them being a pure channel by which the power of God could flow.

The Holy Spirit was able to use them because, again, they were uncompromising when it came to sin. And then the third feature, we hit on it and we'll continue there tonight, is that a church who is uncompromising, a church who is being used by God, will be a church that will experience persecution.
They will be persecuted. This is the third feature of a church that exhibits a gospel community like this early church did in Acts. And so we'll be talking quite a bit about persecution tonight, and it's fitting since I have experienced persecution this week, particularly Monday night here at this church when I came with my KU sweatshirt on.
And all of you mean Oklahoma fans were letting me have it. And then again tonight, because KU lost, I've heard it some more. So I can relate to these men.
No, I don't want to. I don't want to make persecution not a big deal, but, you know, I'm playing with you. I've got to get you back, too, you know. God's watching.
[6:33] And that's right. There's always, we've got another game to play. So an uncompromising, consistent, powerful church will inevitably provoke a hostile reaction from the satanic world system.

And we see this all throughout Scripture, that we can expect this. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3.12, All who desire to live godly in Christ will be persecuted.
As a matter of fact, right, just know that it's going to happen. If you live for Christ, if you're obeying Christ, if you're not just sharing the gospel but living out the gospel, you will be persecuted for that. 1 Peter 2.20, Peter writes, If when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.
So we see that there is a purpose in persecution. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5. Keep your finger in Acts 5. But turn in to Matthew 5.
[7:33] And we'll read one of the many things that Jesus said about us expecting persecution and how we should encounter it, how we should feel when we encounter it, right?

So in Matthew 5.10, again, this is the Sermon on the Mount, greatest sermon ever preached. And that takes a lot of pressure off of a pastor, right?
You'll never preach a better sermon than this sermon. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. And they persecuted, of course, Jesus as well.
So when we are persecuted, once, we should expect it, and two, we should rejoice that we are able to share in the sufferings of those who have come before us and in the sufferings of Jesus, our Lord and Savior.
[8:40] So it should not come as a surprise that the power and effectiveness of the church resulted in bitter opposition, as we are seeing here. Alarmed by the continuing spread of the gospel and the church, the prevailing influence, Scripture says there that the high priest rose up, along with all his associates, who here are the Sadducees, and they were filled with jealousy.

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And so we understand that the high priest and the Sadducees were committed to maintaining the status quo. That's what they wanted. They were trying to maintain business as usual here, and the Christians were upsetting that.
If you remember, it was the Pharisees who primarily led the opposition to Jesus. But here in Acts, especially in the beginning, it's the Sadducees who are leading in opposition to Christ's church. They were primarily concerned with the Romans and keeping them at bay so that they could keep all of their power and their privilege. And so they viewed the Christians as a nuisance, as people who could stir things up and potentially get the Romans involved, and then it would look like they were out of control, and then they would lose all the privileges and the power that they coveted and loved so much.
And they were upset because people were flocking to the church. People were hearing the gospel and believing it, and it was making them jealous as well.
[10:15] They were jealous of the Christians because they were growing in size and influence in the community that they wanted to have influence over. They viewed them as competition. The Christians were a threat to their ability, again, to keep people in their sway.

They saw the Christians as just another Jewish sect, a sect which believed the man who they had murdered had come back to life, and by whom, in whose name, these amazing miracles were taking place.
By his name, again, by his power. And so the Jewish leaders were in a very fragile condition here, both religiously and politically, and so they wanted to squash this.
They were trying to put an end to it. They couldn't endure any more turmoil or else, again, the Romans would step in, and they weren't sure how the dust would settle should that happen.
But they were trying to take matters into their own hands. And so we see that they laid hands on the apostles, and here we assume that it was all 12 of them, all 12 men that they laid hands on, and then they brought them into the public jail.
[11:23] Isn't this kind of silly? Again, we have the Sadducees, the high priests, the Sanhedrin. They've seen over and over again.

They saw Jesus with their own eyes doing these amazing things, things that no ordinary man could do, that no person could do unless he was truly the Son of God. Yet they denied that.
They crucified him, had a big part in that. Then Jesus rose from the dead, right? The tomb couldn't even contain him. They had tried arresting the apostles before, and they had gotten out.
So shouldn't they have known by now that there was no way that they could restrain the power of God? But yet they decided that they're going to throw these men in jail. So here we see that persecution provides opportunities for God to display his power.
For God to display his power. And so there we see an angel of the Lord came during the night and opened the gates of the prison.
[12:24] And here I think we see some of God's sense of humor. You remember how you distinguish a Pharisee from a Sadducee? That a Sadducee, they don't believe in the resurrection.

And so they're sad, you see, right? They also didn't believe in angels. And so what's humorous to me here is that God sends an angel to let these men out of prison, beings who the Sadducees did not believe in.
And so after releasing them, the angel said to them, Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all these words of life. What's these words of life? It's the gospel. Go and preach and teach the people the gospel.
What's interesting here is that they weren't freed so they could run away or so they could go hide someplace until everything blew over and it was safe for them to go back about what they were doing.
They were told to boldly return to the exact same place where they had been arrested and continue to do the exact same thing that they were doing, which was preaching the good news of Jesus Christ.
[13:31] The apostles did not argue with this instruction, which I think is amazing as well. When they heard this, the scripture says there, they entered the temple at daybreak and they began to do what they were commanded to do.

They began to teach just like they had done. So while many of the Sadducees were probably still sleeping or they were eating their breakfast, the apostles were right back out doing what they had

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been doing the previous days and for many days before that, preaching the gospel.
They didn't know that the reaction of the high, the apostles didn't know what the reaction of the high priest and Sadducees would be. Certainly they assumed that they were going to be very angry, that they would try to retaliate in some way, that they would try to take them out.
But again, notice that that wasn't what their focus was on. They didn't care what they might do to them. They cared more about doing what God had commanded them to do and being obedient to what he had asked them to do to continue to preach the gospel and then leaving everything else that was out of their control up to him.
They had faith. They were going to do what God called them to do and they're going to trust God to take care of all the rest, even if that meant that they'd be thrown back in prison or even if that meant that they would lose their lives.
[14:45] Their lives were at risk, but their lives weren't their primary concern. Their primary concern was sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. And so meanwhile, we see that when the high priest did awake and when he had gathered the council, the Sanhedrin together, the officers came, they went to the prison, and they came back after finding out that the prisoners were gone.

And so this perplexed them. And the scripture says, everything was as it should have been, right? Everything was going according to plan.
In the high priest and the Sanhedrin's perspective, all the important people had been gathered. They were ready to preside over this issue with the apostles. They were ready to do something about this, but there was one big problem.
The prisoners were gone. And so here again, they're perplexed. Not surprisingly, when the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard these words, again, scripture says they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what would come of this.
So imagine that you are in position of the Sanhedrin. Imagine that you're one of those men. And you're there and you've been dealing with Christians now for a long time.
[16:06] And Christ, before that, you were there and you witnessed his beating, his trial, his unfair trial, his beatings, his crucifixion. They had played politics with the Romans.

They had incited the Jewish people against Jesus again, which led to his crucifixion. Then three days later after that, they finally thought all of this was done.
Jesus was taken care of. Then these reports begin to surface that he's come back to life, that he's ascended. Then they witness or hear reports again of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And now his followers are growing and they're sharing the gospel. And more people are coming to faith. And we're seeing more examples of the Holy Spirit's awesome power as he's working through the apostles.
And people are being healed miraculously. And they're being healed in the name of Jesus Christ. And so, you know, you've arrested a couple of these apostles before. Remember that?
[17:09] We weren't there that long ago. They sternly warned those guys to stop doing what they were doing. Stop talking in this name. Stop using the name of Jesus. Stop doing these works.

But that didn't work. So now they've got all the apostles and they've put them in prison. And now they think they're finally going to get to the bottom of this. And they wake up the next day and find out that they've escaped.
And there's no explanation for it. They just vanished. They're gone. There's no big hole where the angel, you know, used dynamite to blow them out of there. They just are gone.
And there's no explanation for it. All of their efforts were ineffective. But instead of believing, right, you imagine that after all of this, they still don't believe.
They panic, trying to figure out what would this come to. To them, Christianity was the greatest heresy because Jesus claimed to be equal with God.
[18:07] They charged him with blasphemy, if you remember. If Jesus was the son of God, then that truth was not only a threat to their credibility as leaders, but they were guilty of playing a huge part in putting God's son to death.

This would certainly upstep their status quo. But amazingly, again, they refused to repent and believe. And so at that moment, someone comes to them with the report.
Hey, the guys that you're looking for who broke out of prison, they are back in the temple and they're teaching the people. So again, this probably is not how these Jewish authorities would have expected the apostles to act after prisoners had escaped.

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So think about it. What do prisoners usually do when they escape from prison? They run and they hide, don't they? And who are they hiding from? The authorities.
They're not hiding. They're not hiding. They're not hiding. They're not hiding. They're in a place where they can be easily seen. In fact, they are continuing to preach just as if nothing had happened.
[19:21] And this is a very audacious thing that they are doing. They are resuming the exact same practice that they got arrested for in the exact same place where they were arrested. Then the captain went and they brought them all.

Again, we see not by force for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. And so the apostles, again, we see their popularity and their credibility with the people forced the authorities to proceed with caution when they brought them back to the Sanhedrin.
Again, remember, how did they gain this credibility? Well, we saw it earlier. They were uncompromising in their beliefs, in their ministry. These people were not hypocrites. They were a loving community.
They were displaying the gospel, not just with their words, but in the way that they live, not just amongst one another, but amongst the unbelievers in that community as well.
They were a breath of fresh air to this community, I think, especially to those who were used to dealing with these corrupt Pharisees and Sadducees and high priests.
[20:23] Here were some people who were actually doing kind things. They were going out of their way to help people. They were loving their neighbors as themselves. They were even loving their enemies.

And so when I was thinking about that today, I thought, you know, we have a great time right now in our culture to do this, because I think we see a lot of people right now in our society who are very upset with the corruption, with our politicians.
They're also very upset with the corruption in our media. They're very upset with the corruption that is taking place in our society. A lot of hypocrisy, a lot of double standards.
And people are upset because nobody seems to be practicing what they preach. Nobody seems to be speaking the truth. And so now is a great opportunity for the church to be the light on the hill that we talked about, for that people see that, hey, this is the way it's supposed to be.
And we're having the type of community that we're having, not because we're special people, but because of anything in and of ourselves, but because of who Jesus Christ is and that he has given us his spirit.
[21:30] And we're living in a way that is supernatural. And it's all because of what Christ has done, not anything that we have done. So it's a great opportunity not just to teach the gospel, but to live the gospel out to our world.

And then we see in verses 27 through 28, that when they brought them, they sent them before the council, and the high priest questioned them. And he said, reminding them, hey, we strictly charge you guys not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.
So there was two indictments that the high priest issued here against the apostles. The first was this. He opened his proceedings by reminding the apostles that they were doing what they had asked them to stop doing, that they were disobeying what they had told them.
Stop teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus. And isn't it interesting here that the high priest can't even bring himself to use Jesus' name himself? He just says, that man, right?
He can't even bring himself to use the name of Jesus Christ. So that was the first indictment, that they disregarded the orders of the Sanhedrin. The second was a much more serious indictment than the first one.
[22:50] And that was this, that the apostles intended to bring the blood of Jesus, whom the high priest, again, couldn't even name against them. So this was indictment number two.

Hey, you're trying to blame us. You're trying to pin Jesus' death on us. Which is interesting, again, because as we see, the apostles were guilty of both of these counts.
They were guilty of both of these indictments. They had disobeyed the Sanhedrin's warning, and they had boldly charged the Jewish leaders for their roles in Jesus' death. If you remember Peter's sermon at Pentecost, in chapter 3, verse 15, chapter 4, verses 10 and 11, again and again, the apostles are doing just this.

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They are saying that, you know, hey, you guys killed Jesus. The high priest conveniently, however, forgot that he and his brethren had said to Pilate, you remember what they said?
When Jesus was being trained? Yeah, let his blood be on us and our children. And so the apostles weren't doing anything that they had already requested of themselves, that, hey, let his blood be on us and our children.
[24:01] They were only getting what they had asked for. So here's the question we need to consider quickly here. Is it ever okay to disobey the authorities whom God has placed over us?

Because we see that these men were in authority, and they told the apostles to stop doing this. So is there ever a case when it's okay to disobey the authorities?
And I think you all know the question, or the answer to that question, which is yes. When ever the authorities are asking us or commanding us to do something that would put us in violation of what God has commanded us to do.
Otherwise, Christians should be model citizens. What is also interesting here is that there should be a third indictment.
Shouldn't there? What would the third indictment be? You guys escaped from jail. That should be the third indictment, but conveniently, the Sanhedrin, the high priest, refuses to bring that charge against them.
[25:07] And so you wonder, why is that? Well, I think partly because they're embarrassed, and also because they don't want to admit that these men escaped due to a miracle. And so instead of going there, they rather just choose to ignore the fact that they were miraculously enabled to escape from the prison, which they tried to hold them in.

And again, we see here from these Jewish leaders, John 3, 19, Jesus' words there being a reflection of their hearts, which is that they loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil.
And so all of these facts were there for them to see, but they refused to believe them. And just like Romans 1 says, their foolish hearts were darkened, and they were haters of the light.
So how can we experience the same kind of gospel community? We see that if we are experiencing it, it means that we will be persecuted. But then fourthly, we see the fourth feature is that a gospel community will persevere.
It will be persecuted, but it will persevere. Verses 29 through 32. Let's look at verses 29 through 30 again. But Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men.
[26:27] The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. So the high priest is stern with the apostles, and the apostles are stern right back with him.

And we think Peter here is the spokesman for them. They're not cowering. They're not backtracking. They're not denying that those indictments are false.
In fact, Peter, again, speaking on half of the apostles, goes on the offensive. He's playing prosecuting attorney here, and he's placing the Sanhedrin in opposition to God.
And once again, he's charging them for the death of Jesus Christ, whom they had played a significant role in. And he's bringing that indictment back on them.
Put to death there in the Greek means to put to death with one's own hands. Previously, Peter had charged the Jewish authorities with responsibility for Jesus' death.
[27:25] Now he intensifies that indictment against them, insisting that they are guilty as if it was their own hands who nailed Jesus to the cross.

Peter says that the one whom they hated and despised so much, in verse 31, that this one now God had exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
So the Sanhedrin, they rejected, they hated, they despised Jesus, they executed him, but God has highly exalted this man and has set him at his right hand.
In your Bible, where mine translates archegos as leader, some of you might have prince or maybe something else.
And so what that word refers to is someone who is the originator or pioneer of something. So here Jesus is described as the pioneer or originator or source of eternal life.
[28:37] He came to grant repentance from sins. And he's able to do that, right? Because he's the son of God, because he died as the perfect sacrifice, enduring the wrath of God against our sins for us.

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And here again, we see that repentance from sin is an integral part of saving faith. Salvation demands repentance. And repentance is much more than lip service, right?
I know on Monday night, we talked about the sinner's prayer. And, you know, you can tell somebody, you know, tell God you repent of your sins. But that doesn't mean that you've really repented of your sins.
In fact, you can't truly repent of your sins unless you've truly received the Holy Spirit. Charles Spurgeon said, another proof of the conquest of a soul for Christ will be found in a real change of life.
If the man does not live differently from what he did before, both at home and abroad, his repentance needs to be repented, and his conversion is a fiction. So what's he saying?
[29:47] True repentance is visible. This is who you were before you heard the gospel, before you were saved. Now look at you.

It's a 180. You were enslaved to sin. You were living your life for yourself. But now you've been set free and you're living your life for Christ. Doesn't mean that we don't stumble and make mistakes, right?
And as we go along and our walk with Christ as Christians, there will be time where we need to repent of different sin that we've allowed into our life that has taken our focus off of Christ.
But we have that initial repentance of our salvation. Now we are a new creation, right? We've undergone a new birth. And we are different now because the Holy Spirit of God is living inside of us.
So if anybody comes to you and says, how do I know that I've been saved? One of the things that you can see is, well, let's look at when you say you were saved, what were you like before? How were you living?
[30:44] And is there any change now? Is there the fruit of the Spirit being exhibited in your life? And so that's a clear way to know whether or not somebody has truly repented of their sins.

Verse 32, And we were witnesses to these things, Peter testifies, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.
Interesting again, the Sanhedrin never denies the apostles' claims that they were witnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They never really pushed them on that subject. Here, Peter makes obeying God and the gift of the Holy Spirit synonymous with saving faith.
And then fifthly, the last feature is that their ministry is lasting. Verses 33 through 42. So you remember, they kick the apostles out for a time, and then there's a debate amongst the Sanhedrin, and some of them are, they're hot, they're ready to kill them.
They want to, you know, let's go outside right now, and let's pick up rocks, and let's throw them at them until they die. And then Gamaliel steps up, and he's a voice of wisdom here, and he reminds them, hey, remember these other people who upset the status quo, and they incited, you know, the people to join them, and you saw how all those things just kind of went away.
[32:07] Well, this is going to happen here too, if it's not from God. But if it is from God, then he wisely says, we could be, we could find ourselves in opposition to God, and that is not a place that anybody wants to be in.

And so the concluding verses of this chapter reveal that a gospel community will have a lasting impact, because we see that these men were from God, because their ministry and their work has lasted throughout the centuries.
So here's the bonus point for tonight. Who was Gamaliel's prized pupil? Some of you will know this easily.
Who was Gamaliel's prized pupil? A prized pupil. So Gamaliel, this highly respected rabbi, had a pupil who was training underneath him at this time.
Who was it? Do any of you guys know? Paul. The Apostle Paul. Saul. There you go. See, you get two gold stars. Saul.
[33:15] Yeah, Saul was one of the, if not the most, besides Christ, intelligent and brilliant men of all time. And he was a prized pupil of Gamaliel.

And anyhow, just thought that was interesting. But again, we've got to notice this too. While Gamaliel's counsel seemed wise, the notion that whatever succeeds has God's blessing on it is false.

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because we see a lot of cults that are out there proclaiming to have Christ, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses.
They've lasted for a while. Eventually, they will all come to an end. Only the true faith will last at the very end.
But that doesn't mean that, you know, I'm trying to say his counsel, it seemed wise, but that's not a, that's not a proof that we can, we can just say, oh, okay.
[34:18] Because again, Gamaliel was wise and he was smart, but he was not at this time, at least, if ever he was a follower of Jesus Christ. So, that is Acts chapter 5. In a couple weeks, we'll be back in Acts chapter 6.

But until then, I know that you'll enjoy your study with Lee next week as you continue in 2 Peter.
Let's close in a word of prayer. Lord God, we thank you for who you are and for what you have done for us.
God, that you have made salvation possible through your son, Jesus Christ. That, Lord, you were willing to empty yourself of your privilege, your heavenly privileges that you were willing to come, take on the flesh, to live the perfect lives, Lord, life that we could not live.
And we're willing, Lord, to be obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. And Father, we are so thankful that while we were yet sinners, that, Lord, you died for us, that we might have eternal life.
This is great news, Lord, news that needs to be shared, news that needs to be proclaimed, not just with our words, but the way that we live in community with one another. And, Lord, we pray for our church, we pray for your church, that we would exhibit these features, that we would be a church that has an impact for you here in this world, that people would have an opportunity to hear the gospel by our going and our sharing.
[35:50] Lord, thank you for what you've done for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you.

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