

Alive Again – Resurrection Obedience Acts 5:17-32

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Isn't Jesus lovely? A peaceful man who preached love? How can people possibly hate what He has to say? Surely if the way you follow Jesus makes people angry and deeply offended, you can't be doing it right. Because God is love and Jesus is love personified.

Have you ever heard this kind of idea?
Have you ever been tempted to believe it?

It's a perspective that is preached by people who aren't very familiar with what the Bible actually says. And when we're feeling unsure; stressed and embarrassed, we can be tempted to think it sounds fairly logical.

But the truth is: Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him. His gospel is completely life-changing, and deeply offensive to those who don't want to hear it. It was so offensive that those He came to save flogged Him brutally and put him to death.

In today's passage we see how it deeply offends the leaders of the temple. And in our world today we can sense that it is deeply offending some people who don't want to know about the exclusive, wonderful way to find hope and life. And sometimes when people are deeply offended by the Gospel, they get pretty nasty towards those who are living and sharing it. Which means it can be really hard to stand up for Jesus in a society that finds His words offensive. This is the world we live in now. For example. Many in our society find Jesus' teaching about marriage and human sexuality deeply offensive.

The society the apostles were living in also found the gospel of Jesus deeply offensive. So let's look deeper at what we can learn about how to live as God's people in such times.

In the book of Acts we see the leaders of Jerusalem, the high priest, Sadducees, teachers of the law, and Pharisees. They had just killed Jesus and thought they had all the power. They were big, the followers of Jesus were small. They were the grand-masters, the followers of Jesus like little pawns. They had worked with the mighty Roman Empire to put Jesus to death and it seemed to them that it was check, mate! Game over! This Leunig comic captures it well.

A couple of Roman soldiers look at Jesus on the cross and say, "Look at that! Brilliant! You kill the leader and you nip the whole movement in the bud."

Little did they know that they were not just facing a human opponent. They were not just up against the best the world had to offer, they were not fighting a human movement, but were trying to fight against God himself.

The book of Acts is sometimes called **the Acts of the Apostles**, but I think it should be called **the Continuing Acts of Jesus by His Spirit, through His followers** (I know it's a bit clunky, but it's more accurate). Jesus is risen from the dead and ascended to the Father's side. And the same Jesus is still sovereign and in charge. His Spirit, the Holy Spirit is at work within and through his followers.

And I think the church sometimes gets a little lost when it loses sight of the fact that the Holy Spirit is united with Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the same Spirit of Jesus.

God is sovereign, he rules over all things.

This passage helps us to see that no matter what the circumstances, God is in control and he is faithful.

God has the supremacy. He has the ultimate power and authority.

Leading into our passage we have chapter 4:29 when the apostles pray, "Lord, consider the threats against us" - from the high priest, temple guards and rulers like Herod and Pontius Pilate - As his followers today, in a time when it is unpopular to follow Him and share His gospel ... what threats come against us? What threats would we bring before God now? Lord, consider the threats against us.

"Consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus." This prayer is answered immediately and in an ongoing way. Immediately, they speak God's word boldly...

Then in chapter 5:12 God answers that prayer again by performing signs and wonders through the apostles. He heals the sick and those troubled by impure spirits. God is still sovereignly ruling and is still faithful. Even with opposition, God added more and more men and women to the number of believers.

Next, the jealous high priest and Sadducees imprison the apostles – So, how is God still sovereign and faithful if He lets this happen?

In this situation the angel of the Lord sets them free and God, v20 recommissions them with the task of preaching the whole message of the new life they were living.

God is still sovereign and faithful, as we see in verse 21, His message is going forth and people are able to see this new life he gives lived out by the apostles and other believers.

But God doesn't always miraculously deliver his persecuted followers from prison. God's sovereignty is much greater than that. He will work one way this time and another way next time. In this passage he broke them out of prison, but Paul's letter to the early church from prison show God faithfully at work through Paul's imprisonment. If Paul had been free and able to visit the churches in person, we may not have half the New Testament. Whether God allows imprisonment and beatings or miraculous escapes, He is faithfully present with us and carries out His good and perfect plans.

In vs 28 the high priest says, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." This is the happy result of their persecution. The priests tried to silence them, and in Chapter 8 persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Those who were scattered by the persecution went throughout Judea and Samaria. As they went they preached the word. God, in His sovereignty used that persecution for good.

We see God's sovereignty and faithfulness finally in the apostles themselves as they rejoice in sufferings incurred in the line of duty for Jesus. This may seem backward, illogical or simply strange but the Bible has many examples of God using suffering for good, of turning around terrible circumstances for His glory and the redemption of his people.

The apostle Paul boasts in his weaknesses because Christ is revealed in them. The strength of Christ radiates through his weaknesses, in his times of distress or suffering, (2 cor 4:8, 2 cor 12:9) and indeed in our times of distress, or suffering, or weakness, Christ shines through.

So we have seen that God is sovereign. He reigns in all of these situations and He is faithful.

In today's reading the high priest and Sadducees are so offended by the Apostle's preaching of Christ that they want to kill them. Why would that be?

They **were** the established religious leaders. They knew God the best out of everybody.

They kept the law as best they could. They spent time and energy devoting themselves to the upkeep of the temple, the reading of scriptures and prayers. They concerned themselves with correct doctrine, with the purity of Israel and with correcting those who didn't keep the law. In their understanding, God was Holy. Israel were his special people, and the land was their inheritance. The temple was God's holy place where He 'lived'. So, when the Christians were preaching the gospel of Christ and doing signs and wonders in the temple they were indignant.

To them, the apostles were undermining the order of things as they should be. It was sacrilegious, and deeply offensive.

So in **Verse 18 the apostles are put in jail**. How discouraging for them. They felt that they were obeying God but then it appears that things have been turned against them.

The apostles, however, are obedient to God despite discouragement. They received a renewed commissioning from the angel and obeyed immediately.

I don't know about you, but the times I am most likely to do the wrong thing are when I am discouraged.

If we were the apostles, discouraged, in jail, we may be tempted to take the easy route, to stop proclaiming Jesus. It certainly seems a supernatural, counter-intuitive response that they went straight back out and kept preaching the gospel. Only the Holy Spirit at work in them comforting and empowering them could cause this to happen. And it's the same for us. The Holy Spirit gives us that same comfort, power and boldness when we trust Him.

Let's look at Peter, the one speaking. We have seen that after being filled with the Spirit he was empowered to speak the word of God boldly.

Before that, he was an impulsive, shoot-from-the-hip sort of guy. He was the one to whom Jesus had to say, "Get behind me Satan" and He was the one who most loudly proclaimed his loyalty to Christ and then denied him three times just prior to the crucifixion.

But Peter was obedient in that when he stuffed up, he always came back to Jesus.

Coming back to Jesus every time we blunder is part of the process of learning obedience. The great news for us is that the Holy Spirit is both a personal witness to us of all that Christ has done, and the one who enables us to speak about Christ.

In Matthew 10 verse 19 we see that when we are persecuted or face opposition Jesus says, “do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”. This is talking about a specific mission of the 12 disciples but the principles do apply to us.

The same Spirit has us in his grasp and will not let us go.

Later, in the same passage about opposition Jesus says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” But for us who believe he continues telling us that we are incredibly valuable and do not need to fear. He sums up in verses 32 & 33: “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven”. Ouch! Did you hear that? Whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my Father in heaven. Costly obedience isn’t optional. It’s part of following Jesus. If we want Jesus to remember us in heaven, we can’t deny Him on earth. But He is with us, strengthening us every step of the way.

These days there are many little and not so little moments where it seems easier to deny Jesus. To back down, not mention what we really believe, and hope the fire will die down. So, it comes to this choice. Do we choose Jesus – and along with him the possibility of persecution and opposition? Or do we choose against him?

When we choose Jesus, and open ourselves to opposition, then how do we live? The apostles prayed for boldness, signs and wonders. Let’s pray for boldness, yes. And let’s pray for God to move powerfully in the way He wants to. Whether that is miraculously setting us free from opposition, persecution and imprisonment, **or**, working powerfully through us as we face opposition and struggles. Jesus still rules by His Spirit. He still holds all the keys, can open any door. He can work through his people being imprisoned and writing letters, or can open the doors and set his people free to preach. And He invites us to join Him. To find purpose in loving and proclaiming Him.