


A Five-Day Devotional Journey
February 24 - March 1, 2008
Acts 5:17-42

Rough Times Ahead

1 Give the people this message of life!

Read. Acts 5:17-23 NLT

The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!"

So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial. But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, "The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!"

Think.

- What is driving the jealousy of the Sadducees? When have you been on the other side of someone's jealousy? What did you do?
- How do you think the 12 felt being put in jail? What do you think they expected to happen next? What's the worst thing that ever happened to you when you shared your faith?
- Why does God sometimes "bail us out" and sometimes leave us to "serve our time"?

Pray.

Lord, help me to eat, drink, and live all the "words of this Life" — and to freely share them.

Live.

Help lead someone out of their personal prison.

I've told you these things to prepare you for rough times ahead.

They are going to throw you out of the meeting places. There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he's doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood the Father. I've told you these things so that when the time comes and they start in on you, you'll be well-warned and ready for them.

John 16:1-4, Message

The Message runs in the midst of ongoing and intensifying opposition.

That could be the tagline for the entire book of Acts. Jesus had prepared them for the "rough times" ahead. They were to be and to bear good news to the four corners of the earth — and not everyone would appreciate them for it. Peter and John had faced off with these leaders once before, and now all twelve face round two. Peter displays the same boldness, the religious crowd the same entrenched resolve not to surrender their turf to those they supposed to be only messianic usurpers — even in the face of angelic intervention. Mere threats are exchanged for murderous designs — but a voice of reason restrains their hand. Blood still flows as backs are laid bare in a humiliating public scourging. But the Message moves forward still as the religious powers-that-be bide their time with a wait-and-see attitude.

It surprises us when the world fails to appreciate our noble efforts in advancing the kingdom. We look for applause and recognition, or at the very least acceptance. And sometimes we get it. But often we don't. We can understand the rejection when the church itself embodies unchristian ways of narrow judgment and religious games. But to live largely and generously in faith and love and then to be met with accusations and plots, arresting hands and jail cells, catches us off guard. It's a present reminder that we live out the gospel of Jesus in a hostile world where people desperately need it, but whose power structures will never cease being threatened by Jesus followers.

2) The apostles before the high council

Read. Acts 5:24-28 NLT

When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. Then someone arrived with startling news: “The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!”

The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. “Didn’t we tell you never again to teach in this man’s name?” he demanded. “Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!”

Think.

- How do the authorities respond to the news that the formerly jailed apostles are out and at it again in the Temple? What does their response say about them?
- When the apostles are brought back into court, what accusation is made against them? How does this differ from what had been bothering the council (see Acts 4:2) in “round one” of the local opposition?
- In your walk with Christ, what opposition have you encountered lately? How have you responded?

Pray.

Father, keep me ever sensitive to your presence and the new and unexpected moves you are making.

Live.

What new thing is God challenging you to do now?

4) Fighting against God!

Read. Acts 5:34-39 NLT

But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. Then he said to his colleagues, “Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

“So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

Think:

- How do you read Gamaliel? Was he a political opportunist? A secret believer? Did he just want everyone to get along? What’s his point in citing two former failed messianic insurrections?
- How would you summarize Gamaliel’s argument? How sound are his reasons? What irony do you hear in his conclusion?
- When might you have suddenly found yourself “fighting against God” and moving at cross-purposes with his plans? What did you do? How can we keep this from happening?

Pray.

Lord, give me a refreshed, wide-angle view of your work in this world — and to risk getting involved.

Live:

Be a voice of calm and reason in a potentially heated conflict.

3) Peter and the apostles replied...

Read. Acts 5:29-33 NLT

But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him.”

When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them.

Think.

- “We must obey God rather than men.” When’s the last time you found yourself in a situation — at work, at school, or wherever — when this was the radical choice you faced? How did you handle it? What happened?
- What counter charge does Peter make against the high priest? How might you have responded in Peter’s place?
- What emotion do see evident in Peter’s answer to the high priest? How do you account for his courage?
- Where in your life are you facing a situation in which you could use this kind of courage?

Pray.

Lord, fill me with an undying resolve to be true to you, no matter what the opposition or outcome may be.

Live.

Radically obey God rather than man today.

5) Counted worthy to suffer

Read. Acts 5:40-42 NLT

The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.”

Think.

- How did the apostles respond to being publicly beaten? What do you think enabled them to respond this way?
- What impact does this opposition seem to have had on the life of the church? What is the church continuing to do?
- When you are in any way wronged or insulted for your faith (particularly in a very public way), in which of the following ways do you typically respond:
 - a) adopt a “victim” mentality
 - b) sue them
 - c) pray for those who have wronged me
 - d) just shrug it off
 - e) do cartwheels
 - f) quit going public with my faith; or _____
- In what relevant way or ways is God calling *you* to teach and preach the message that “Jesus is the Messiah”?

Pray.

Father, show me how to rejoice in the midst of hardship and injustice because of your name. Grow me from the place of needing to be coddled to courageously standing in my faith.

Live.

Following *his* lead, share Christ in a truly Christian way.