

Counted Worthy - Acts 5:17-42
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

“When they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.” (Acts 5:40-41)

I can't read these words without trembling. If you scan over them you will probably miss the shocking nature of this statement in the story of Acts. But pause and you will see it. The entire story over three chapters builds to this moment. Peter and John are brought in before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council referenced here) and warned to stop preaching and teaching in Jesus' name, yet they go right back to the Temple and proclaim Christ with the rest of the Apostles. More and more people are turning to Jesus as the Messiah, meanwhile the religious leaders are more and more agitated. So the High Priest and Sadducees arrest all 12 of the Apostles and throw them in prison. The Sadducees were the party with the greatest influence in Jerusalem and had majority voice in the Sanhedrin. They were theological liberals who rejected the concept of the resurrection and denied the existence of angels. So they throw the Apostles in prison for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. You know God has a sense of humor here, because He sends an angel to set the Apostles free. What would you do at this moment? Probably not what they did, because they went right back to the Temple the next morning. When the council went searching in prison for them the Apostles were already preaching Jesus in the Temple. This perplexed the Sanhedrin, and the guards knew better than to rough these men up in public, because their ministry had gained favor with the masses (remember the guy who was healed?). When they confront the Apostles again in a more formal trial the response they get is the same. “We must obey God rather than men,” followed by a clear explanation of the Gospel and even an offer of repentance and salvation to the men who represent Israel. This only enrages these leaders, especially the Sadducees, and now they want the Apostles dead. Had it not been for the intervention of a very respected Jewish scholar and leader the story of the Apostles could have ended that morning. Instead of death, the Sanhedrin beat the Apostles. This means each of them were stripped and in public they were whipped and beaten. The goal of this is to both harm and shame the Apostles, discouraging their activity and publically condemning their teaching and making them fools. What would you do at this point? Curse the Sanhedrin? Start a protest? Leave?

Rejoice? Nope, not in my nature. This is why this moment is so crazy. Their response is to rejoice. They went out of that meeting bleeding, limping, hurting, yet they also went out singing and praising. And for what reason, they found joy in being counted worthy to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus. This is not fake happiness or some kind of pushing through tears. Luke tells us that the authentic response from the Apostles in their persecution was to rejoice, to express deep and beautiful joy. Where does this come from?

The truth of the matter is this, that our joy is one of God's great goals. We all seek happiness, yet we seek it in things of the earth. We even turn our religion into an attempt to force God to make us happy by giving us the things we believe will make us happy and withholding parts of life that are hard. Yet, the whole human story is about the pursuit of happiness and the abject failure in finding it anywhere other than in God and God alone. On the other hand, God has so chosen to bless His people and fill them with His Spirit that they find an inexpressible, lasting joy that transcends the trials and loss of things in this world. The experience of this joy is both to be pursued and promised. We pursue it by choosing to rejoice in trials, hardship, persecution, and suffering (Matthew 5:12-14, Philipians 4:4, 1 Peter 4:12-14, James 1:2-4, along with a myriad of Psalms). The Apostles rejoicing is another example of their willing obedience to the commands of Jesus. Yet, while they pursue this joy it is also promised to them as they live in faith and obedience. In fact, the clue to understanding their joy comes from understanding their response to the Sanhedrin. For the second time

they tell this council that their lives are consumed in the obedience of Christ, no matter the cost. This is really the core reason so many people who claim Christ do not experience this type of joy, as they claim to trust in Jesus but do not actually choose to walk in obedience. The path to joy is the path of obedience to Christ in our lives, and when we choose not to live in obedience, to pursue our own path, it is at that point that we are proclaiming that our joy is in something other than Christ, and also the point where we will expect Jesus to make us happy by giving us what we want. For the believer in Jesus this is the surest path to heartache and sadness.

The joy the Apostles exhibit is not something reserved for only the all-stars of our faith. This joy, this authentic happy life is promised to all who genuinely trust and obey Jesus. And the joy consistently comes out in moments of persecution and even martyrdom throughout church history, as those who know Jesus willingly go to their deaths often singing praises on the way. God does want you to find joy, to be happy. But this joy is only found in Him.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Jeremiah 1	Jeremiah 2	Jeremiah 3	Jeremiah 4	Jeremiah 5	Jeremiah 6	Jeremiah 7

Reading from this past week: Acts 5:17-42

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 6:1-7

Family Worship

Song - *Oh Great God*

<https://youtu.be/gOPbanJKWE8>

Gospel Project

Unit: A Pattern of Disobedience

Story: God provided for Hannah

Big Picture Question: What is the fair payment for sin?

Answer: The fair payment for sin is death.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1-3

New City Catechism

Question #20: Who is the redeemer?

Answer: The only Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse: 1 Timothy 2:5

Scripture

Acts 5:17-42

- What is your favorite thing in this story? Why?
- How do the Apostles respond to the charges made against them in verses 29-32? Why would they include their call to obey God rather than men?
- How does reading and hearing how the Apostles responded to being shamed and beaten make you feel? How does this response glorify God?
- What brings you the most joy in life? Why will finding our true and lasting joy in anything other than Jesus always fall short of the goal?

Prayer

*Ask God to give you the type of joy that would allow you to rejoice in suffering like the Apostles.

*Pray for all of our graduates who are finishing classes in high school, college, and grad school and receiving their diplomas.