

Acts 5:12-42

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[0 : 00] If you wanted a title that I was going to put over what I have to say this morning, I'm going to give it to you in the words of verse 20, where the angel tells the apostles to go and stand in the temple courts and tell the people all about this new life.

That's what we're going to speak about today. We're going to speak about what the angel referred to as this new life. You see, there's this vibrancy about the early church.

It just all seems so fresh and so alive. Here is this new group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ rejoicing in the new life that they have in Him.

And it's in such contrast to the old, tired, stodgy, status quo kind of establishment religion that the Jews had.

And they kind of come into conflict, really, at this point. But these people, they had this new life. And so I wonder all these centuries later on, where we are as far as this is concerned.

[1 : 38] I wonder if that sense of vitality and exhilaration that the young church had in those early days is something that still characterizes the people of God now.

Or maybe, in turn, we have become the old status quo as the years have passed by. And the question, I guess, for us to ask ourselves is, how could we recapture again the spirit of the early church?

You think of new life. And as we were saying with the children, you think of the excitement when a new life comes into the family. I remember sitting in the surgery some years ago, and a man came in who just had had major transplant surgery.

And we just took him off the majority of all his medication. It must have felt like a brand new life for that man. You know, rather than having the cloud of illness hang over his head, you know, to have this transplant given to him, it was just like a new life that he had.

Or you think of somebody who's been in prison for a number of years. Remember these shots of Nelson Mandela from years ago on that long walk to freedom?

[3 : 06] You know, when he walked out of the prison after all those years of incarceration, And it must have seemed to him that he had been given his life back, that he had a brand new life.

And in a spiritual sense, as believers in the Lord Jesus, I mean, that is exactly what we have. Having been born again and been given the new birth.

We actually have the life of Christ himself pulsating through our veins. And I wonder whether we need to just recapture the grandeur and the excitement of what that really means, as the early church had.

Now, when we come to this passage here that talks about this new life, there are basically three scenes in our reading. The first scene, from verses 12 down to 16, takes place in the temple, or more specifically, in a part of the temple known as Solomon's Colonnade.

The second scene, from verses 17 to 26, it's not in the temple, it's in the jail, or it's in the vicinity of the public jail.

[4 : 32] And then the final scene, from verse 27 to the end, is a courtroom scene. So these are the three things that we're going to be thinking about today.

We're going to be thinking of the temple, the jail, and the court. And what we're going to find out is that in each of these three scenes, there is a kind of standout phrase that just jumps out at us from the text that seems to summarize what is going on in each of these places.

And it helps us to understand some aspect of this new life that the church was enjoying. So if we went to the first one, from 12 down to 16, the phrase that jumps out at me is from verse 13.

And the phrase says this, no one dared join them. Nobody dared join them. So here they are, this group of people, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and as far as the general population is concerned, nobody was queuing up to join them.

And the reason for that was there was a sense of hesitation, there was a sense of fear because of what had just taken place in the preceding part of chapter 5 regarding two of the members, Ananias and Sapphira, who had lied to the Holy Spirit and God's judgment had come in and both of these people, husband and wife, had actually fallen down dead.

[6 : 20] And that became known. And so nobody was all that keen to be part of a community like that where lying and dishonesty and greed ended up with people losing their lives in this kind of way.

And so nobody dared, nobody dared to join them. But if you look down the text here, you will see that there is a strange, almost contradiction.

And the strange contradiction is this, that although there was this sense of fear and hesitation, at the same time, verse 14, more and more men and women were actually believing in the Lord and were being added to their numbers.

And you get the description of how people were being brought to them from even the villages around. And so how do you marry both of these things together?

I think there is an explanation, you know, for it. And the explanation, I feel, is this, that although there was this sense of fear and they looked at the church and they saw the church had high standards, that honesty and purity were important things.

[7 : 45] And there was a sense that the presence of God in His holiness was among this people. That although that seemed to be a deterrent at one level, at another level, there was something that was immensely attractive about that.

The fact that God was there. And it wasn't just the same as any kind of club or association or other group of people who met together. But God Himself was seen to be there among these people.

And they were different. And that had a fascination. And there was almost a kind of magnetism about that that attracted people despite their sense of fear to be added to their numbers and to believe the message.

You see, we shouldn't lower our standards in the gospel. We shouldn't just try to attract people by becoming like the world.

People are sick of that. People have had enough of the world. They've tried all of that. And they've found that it doesn't work. And that it doesn't satisfy.

[9 : 08] And it doesn't reach to the need that they feel in their heart. And they don't want us to become like that. What they're really looking at is for somebody to present the truth of God.

and for God to be experienced. Something that is otherworldly. So let's let's hold on to the identity that the early church had.

And recapture that spirit. This is such an integral component of the new life that they had. It was a new life that had God's presence at its very heart.

Maybe there's somebody here today who never really experienced the presence of God in your soul. You've come along here maybe week by week.

Maybe this is your first time. Because I don't know very many of you. You've come looking for answers that you've never found in anything else that you've tried.

[10 : 15] And we come to the book of God. To these people. We're reading accounts of things that happened 2,000 years ago. And here we are with the pages of this book opened in front of us because we believe it has got a living message that can transform all of our lives if we believe it.

If we do the ABC like we said with the children. If we admit where we are and we believe this. And if we call upon the name of the Lord to be saved.

That's the first thing. And the scene changes. I guess if there was some sort of film of this that would zoom away from the temple court.

And this time we're focused on a jail scene from verse number 17. The apostles are arrested. They're put in this public jail.

I want you to notice in passing the main reason that they were arrested. It's there in verse 17.

[11 : 27] It talks about this party, this religious party. It was a secular party called the Sadducees. It says that they were filled with jealousy.

Now, they would have given other reasons for the arrest. They would have talked about, you know, their teaching and all the rest of it.

But basically, at the root was jealousy. Jealousy. They were jealous of what the church had.

The sense of life. The sense of conviction. The sense of the presence of God. God. And how the people were believing in it. And the numbers were growing.

And they were jealous of all of that. Now, the point is this. That sometimes, you know, people might give reasons for why they don't believe the gospel.

[12 : 29] Why they are opposed to Christianity and the teaching of Christ. But it's often the case that the real reason for their opposition is actually much more kind of visceral than the kind of logical reasoned approach that is presented.

Now, the point I'm making is this. That sometimes, no matter how well you may argue the position of the gospel, no matter the information that you may give, no matter the facts and the figures, some people will not be persuaded by that information.

And it's because there's a more deep-seated resistance. People come with a fixed mind at times. There are things that have happened in life.

There are cultural things. There are social things that sometimes go deeper than just information and facts and figures. These people were prejudiced in this passage.

Jealousy, in their case, was the reason that they were not willing to accept the gospel and that they had these men arrested.

[13 : 58] And sometimes, to be honest with ourselves, it's good to sit down and reflect. If we are in that place where we are opposed to Christ, we have never believed and called upon His name.

We've never committed ourselves in faith to following the law of Jesus Christ. What is my reason for that? Is there a logical reason for that?

Or is there some deeper kind of thing that is in my heart? And despite any compelling argument, I may remain opposed.

It's only God's Spirit that can really break into our hearts and change that. At any rate, during the night, an angel of the Lord appears in this prison and opens the doors of the jail and frees them and comes to our main verse and says to them, gives them instructions, now you go back to where you came from, boys.

Go back into the temple and you've got to present to the people all about this new life.

[15 : 13] Now, I want you just to look at that phrase because he just doesn't say, tell the people about this new life. He says, if you look at some of the other translations, the New American, for instance, says, tell the people the whole message of this life.

Or the New King James Version says, tell the people all the words of this life. And the point is that this message of life has got so many dimensions to it.

It's not a one-dimensional thing. There are so many layers and there are so many facets to it. It's such a rich subject. It's a tremendous treasure, the message of the gospel and of this life in Christ.

And the angel is saying to him, give them it all. Make sure you explain it fully in all its many glorious dimensions to the people.

So, I guess the application that comes to us today is this. I wonder if we have been guilty of seeing the gospel just as a kind of one-dimensional thing.

[16 : 33] And we haven't really dug down deep into the rich gold mine, if you like, of the treasures of the gospel and all that's contained in it, the tremendous resources for the believer in the word of God, and all the different facets and angles and dimensions that there are to the gospel and the word of God.

I mean, if we were just to speak on one of the angles this morning, you know, we would never be able to exhaust it. I mean, if we were just able to develop a little bit further, for instance, the idea of it being new life that a person experiences when they come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fact that although we are born physically into a world and we have a physical life, which is such a wonderful thing, and you know, we have all these senses that allow us to experience so much, the smells and the sights and the sounds of life and all the other things, that in fact, although we are born with physical life, we are actually born dead, spiritually dead.

There's a deadness as far as my interaction with God. I'm cut off from God. There is absolutely nothing. There is no response.

There is no sight, sounds, smell, relationship at all between me and God, naturally speaking.

[18 : 18] I'm dead because of my trespasses and my sins. It's a condition that I have. When Adam sinned in the garden, the blight of sin, the shutters came down and cut them off from God and affected everything, absolutely everything.

The curse of sin descended upon the soul of man and upon our world. And so you see the sickness and the suffering and the tragedy of human life.

You see the fact that even the environment was affected, the thorns and the thistles that began to grow from the soil. You saw that even the physical constitution and makeup of Adam and Eve altered.

She was going to experience childbirth and pain would be such an integral component of that. And there would be a tension that would come in even to the relationship between the husband of the wife and the wife.

And he was told that to the dust that he had come from, he would one day return and death would descend. This world, glorious as it is, it's not what God created it to be like, with all its tragedy and suffering and all the things that we experience.

[19 : 45] There's a death, Paul, that hangs over us all, but we can be made alive. That death can be transformed and there can be a new life that is infused within us.

You think of the incident, the narrative, where Jesus is taken to the grave of Lazarus, his friend. And the description is that Lazarus has been dead for four days.

And by this time, he's decomposing. And Christ is upset. he weeps genuine tears of sorrow for the sisters, for the family, for the whole situation, for the tragedy of death, for the sense of loss.

And in that sense, he enters into our suffering with his love. And yet, he's able to stand before that tomb and utter the words of authority, Lazarus, come out, come forth, and the great description is of a man still bound with grave clothes, who's propelled out of a tomb because of the authority of the Son of God, who's able at a physical level in the days of his flesh to have the authority to give new life to somebody who had died.

And Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. And he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

[21 : 41] And that resurrection of Lazarus, it was a message, a spiritual message that still comes to us through all these years about a bigger sense of resurrection than what Lazarus experienced.

It's how despite the death and the decomposition that spiritual death brings to our existence, that in Christ there is resurrection and in Christ there is life for those who believe in him.

So Christ is presented to us in all his greatness this morning. We view Christ in all the glory and the authority of who he is, the Son of God, the resurrection and the life.

Do we believe in him? Do we have belief in the greatness of Christ as the imparter of this new life that I need?

See, everything has been affected by the curse of sin. The way I think about things, my reasoning processes, the way I feel about things, my aspirations and my desires, they're all tainted.

[23 : 11] The choices and the decisions that I make, all of that is affected. That's what's meant by the phrase total depravity.

It's not I'm as bad as I possibly could be. It doesn't mean I'm like Hitler or Stalin, but it means in the totality of my person, in every aspect of who I am as a human being, my emotions, my choices, my thinking, everything is affected.

Nothing has escaped the effect and blight and death of sin, yet Christ can come in. Like these people, you know, what I'm trying to do this morning is give you all the words of this new life, and all its glory, Christ's salvation, salvation, which can enter into my life.

As Jesus said, and I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will pluck them out of my hand.

What a wonderful promise to know that we can have eternal life and be held in the grip, the secure grip of Christ's salvation, that that good work that he starts off in our life, he will carry it on until the day of completion, the day of Jesus Christ.

[24 : 42] And it's not my grip on Christ that's the big thing, it's his grip on me that matters. They're in my hand, and nobody will ever pluck them out of my hand.

And you, says Ephesians chapter 2, you who were dead in your trespasses and in your sins have been raised again with Christ by grace, you're saved.

The Christian has passed over from the state of death to the state of life. we're alive in Christ, and we're alive to God, and all of that is just one facet, one dimension of this new life.

There's such a richness to it all, and the early church grasped this. So let's try and recapture our appreciation of the life that the believer has in Christ and learn to proclaim it in its fullness just as these people did on that occasion to a dead world.

Maybe again there's somebody here today who's never experienced the life of God in the soul of a man or a woman. This new eternal life that Christ can give is an opportunity for you today to call upon the name of the Lord so that you could be saved.

[26 : 23] But let's come to the final scene, which is a courtroom scene at verse number 27. It's a religious court. It's the highest court in the nation.

It's called the Sanhedrin. It consisted of 70 men, religious leaders, and they bring the apostles in and they begin to question them.

And the court proceedings are in two different parts, if you read this closely. First of all, at the beginning, the apostles are present during the proceedings.

And when they're present, you know, they reply to what is being kind of leveled at them in the words of verse 29, when they say, we hear what you're saying, but, we must obey God rather than man.

You know, they're not rabble-rousers. You know, they're not rebels. They're good citizens, as all Christians should be, model citizens.

[27 : 32] But when it comes to making a decision about what God says in His book, and something that might be absolutely opposed and contrary to that, the Christian must be courageous and go along with this, that we have to obey God rather than obey men.

The second part of the proceedings, the apostles are put out, and when they're out of the room, a discussion takes place.

verse 34, or rather, there's a speech that is made, and the speech is made, verse 34, by a Pharisee who is held in high regard by the name of Gamaliel.

Gamaliel is honored by all the people. And at first reading, you think, my, my, the church has got a defender here.

Gamaliel speaks up and seems to be on their side. He seems to be a sympathizer. And the phrase that jumps out from this scene, you know, the first one was nobody dared.

[28 : 52] The second scene had the phrase all the words of this new life. The phrase from this third scene is down in verse 39.

Gamaliel says, be very careful what you do with these men. You may find yourself fighting against God. That's it. Be careful. You may be fighting against God.

Now, what I'd like to say is that I think we need to look twice at Gamaliel. As I say, on first reading, he seems very impressive.

He's doing a courageous thing. He seems to be siding with the apostles. As he advises them, just let them go. You know, don't do anything that you're going to regret, just in case you find yourself on the wrong side and you're fighting against God and you will never succeed.

But I think really Gamaliel's little talk is all about practicalities.

[30 : 03] It's all about just what's the best way to diffuse this situation? What is the best way to take the steam out of everything that's going on just now?

How can we just calm things down a little bit? it? And so, it's all done for kind of political expediency and it's not really done with a sense of real belief that, you know, God is on their side.

He expects it all to fizzle out. You know, he gives these other couple of examples, doesn't he, of people who are just the same as what's going on before. Something happened. This man arose.

There was a hullabaloo for a little while and then the whole thing just settled down and it faded away and that's what we're going to expect here. That's the best way to deal with this.

Just take the hands off, let it go, let it all calm down, it's all going to fizzle out. I think there's a real lesson in this as we look at Gamaliel.

[31 : 13] I mean, a couple of lessons probably. The first one is this, let's not be naive. when we hear people use the name of God.

Let's not be naive to think that everybody who talks about the Bible or who uses the name of Christ or who makes some sort of reference to the gospel is automatically a sympathizer and is a believer.

Let's not be taken in by that. There's a lot more to it than just saying words. about being a Christian, isn't there? I mean, I have known people who, you know, have read the Bible.

I have known people who have taken communion, who have been baptized, who have been members of the church, and have seemed to be involved in so many different things, and at the end of the day, they've kicked over the traces, and they don't believe it anymore, because they never had it in the first place.

I mean, that's what Jesus referred to in the parable of the sower, wasn't it? You know, there was a category when the seed fell, and the whole thing sprang up immediately, and you thought, well, well, this is something that has been successful.

[32 : 39] And yet he said, after a little while, you know, because there was no root, and it was just shallow ground, and the sun came out, and the difficulties of life began, they backed down, shriveled up, withered away, when any kind of difficulty came across the horizon, and they were asked to stand for Christ, whatever, they were gone.

Irrespective of that initial kind of response and excitement, commitment. And so we have to be discerning, we have to be careful. It's not just what I say that constitutes me a true believer, it's what I believe in my heart, and it's how that belief changes my life, because my life proves the reality of what I say.

My father was at a funeral on Friday down in the Glasgow area, a chap he knew from his teens. He said, this guy was a Glasgow gang leader, way back then, in the day, and had come into a church service to make trouble, and somebody said to him, as they were trying to make trouble on the way out, son, I think you really need God's salvation.

That was all he said, and that got to Donald, got to him, into his head and mind, he thought about that. He got converted, and from being a Glasgow gang leader, right through to the end of his life, with all its toils and troubles that he had, he was a bilateral amputee, he had children who had health issues, the man's life changed dramatically.

It wasn't just a flash in the pan, it wasn't just an emotional response, this new life that he had received changed the whole course of his life, became a lover of the Bible, an obeyer of the Bible, a teacher of the Bible, proved the reality of that decision and that profession.

[34 : 57] Gamaliel, it's just words. Gamaliel, sounds good, you're a great speaker, what an orator, he persuaded them. It doesn't mean anything to Gamaliel, it's just practicalities, it's just getting the situation fixed and sorted.

It's a challenge to us that, isn't it? A man who seems to have the new life, but he doesn't have it at all, he doesn't have it at all. What a challenge that is to us, not just to be hearers of the word, but to be doers of it.

To experience the reality of God's word in our hearts. Now let me just close here with a final phrase from this third scene.

They listen to what Gamaliel says, well, not entirely, because they're not just let go, they're flogged, verse number 40.

They're severely flogged, and then they're ordered not to speak in the name of Jesus. And look at verse 41, and the apostles leave the Sanhedrin, and they're rejoicing.

[36 : 11] And here's the phrase, they've been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for his name. Now isn't that remarkable?

I mean, you'd think there's something wrong with these people, to rejoice after that flogging. But the way they reasoned it was this. Hey, I've been counted worthy today to suffer for the cause of Christ.

To suffer for the name of Christ. The way they reasoned it in their minds was this, is that they are treating me today as they would have treated Christ.

They must be seeing something of Christ in me. For to treat me in this way. And they knew, and Peter wrote this later on, actually, in his first letter, that Christ has given us an example that we might follow in his steps, who did no sin.

neither was guile found in his mouth. And when he suffered, he threatened not. He committed himself to the God who judges righteously.

[37 : 34] And in a sense, they thought there was no higher honor. Because people couldn't get at Christ personally, because Christ is now in heaven.

They get at them instead. They are the personification of Christ. Christ. And he saw that as an honor. Now, we're not trying to say that, you know, there's something kind of masochistic about this.

But we are saying this, that, you know, the church needs, again, to develop a theology of suffering. Some people say that you become a Christian and all of life is easy.

You know? And there's never a problem and never a cloud on the horizon. That's not the case. Look at what happened to these early apostles. Some of them died, you know, because of their faith in Christ.

Most of them died because of their belief in Christ. But the thing that changed the difficulties of their life was, in a sense, the words that Gamaliel said.

[38 : 38] Because he spoke something that was truer than he actually recognized, that you can't fight against God. You cannot fight against God.

And despite there being trials and tribulations and desperate situations that Christians have had to face over the years and currently still face in different parts of the world, terrible things, at the end of the day, you know, you can't fight against God.

You know? And the cause of Christ will prevail. And Christ will always reign. And although men might destroy my body, as Jesus said, they cannot destroy my soul.

And there will be a resurrection of the just. And one day, that life, that new life that we've talked about will be taken to another dimension. When I pass through the gates of splendor into the presence of Christ himself, into heaven, come into the joy of your Lord.

When you visit a graveside, a burial of a Christian man or woman, and you realize that, you know, this ground, this very ground where they have been placed, will one day rip apart when Christ returns and calls them heavenward and homeward as a citizen of heaven, the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[40 : 20] And then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be forever with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words, says the great apostle.

With this sense of triumph and vitality, we leave the early church. This new life.

Again, I wonder whether that needs to be rediscovered. Look at the life that they had. Look at the things that they experienced. These phrases that jump out.

May we, in our time, recapture all that it means to have this new life in Christ. Now shall we sing our final psalm?

Malzheimer, which is for today.

[41 : 34] Organic and change. In the career, let us value our life in Christ. We want to navigate closer to future ofiles. damals