

March 20/21, 2021

**You Can't Stop This!**  
*Daring to Be the Church Series*  
**Acts 5:12-42**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

The apostle Paul wrote, "They had learned to be content in any circumstance. That he was rejoicing always. That he was anxious about nothing." So you might say, "Well, he didn't go through a year like we went through in 2020!" Right? But it might be helpful to know he wrote those words from a Roman prison cell, awaiting potential execution under the Emperor Nero. So what is it Paul knew, that allowed him to write those words in those circumstances? Well, that's what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to the book of Acts, Chapter 5.

In my experience in ministry, the most stressful thing for leaders in ministry is growth, by far. Growth produces stress, both externally and internally. Externally, you put a target on your chest because everybody's going to throw stones. Internally, there are just things you have to keep changing and adjusting to care for the people. This is what we will see throughout the book of Acts as the church continues to expand and grow. There are external issues and there are internal issues. Last week, Josh talked to us about Ananias and Sapphira. It's a very sobering passage, dealing with an internal issue. Now once again, the church is thriving, which is going to create an external issue. Verse 12:

**At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed. (\*NASB, Acts 5:12-16)**

So it's worth noting that, again, we're told that the signs and wonders were limited to the apostles. There's nowhere in the book of Acts where it ever says all the people were doing signs and wonders. The apostles were a unique group of men, called to a very specific time in history. So they continue to do these signs and wonders. Verse 13 tells us **none of the rest dared to associate with them**. There's quite a bit of conversation among commentators trying to figure out who **the rest** are; it's really impossible to figure that out. But what's more to the point is, it's clear that there is now this significant tension between the religious council, the religious and civil council, and the apostles. So people are feeling the danger and they're pulling back. It's pretty risky to be seen with them. But we're also told in verse 14, that more and more people are believing. The first number we got in the book of Acts was 2000 converts. And then we got 5000 converts. That's actually the last number we get in the book of Acts. But what's worth noting here, in verse 14, is it says **multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number**. There's only one time in the New Testament, and that's here, where multitudes is used in the plural. So not just

multitudes, but multitudes, *constantly* added to their number. The church was absolutely exploding in Jerusalem. This is the first time we learned that it's moving beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem, to surrounding cities, and they're coming to Jerusalem with people to be healed. Now this strange part about Peter and his shadow: whether there was healing power in his shadow or not, is not known; the text really isn't specific. It just gives you an idea of what's happening in Jerusalem. But, of course, then that's going to attract external pressure. Verse 17:

**But the high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out, he said, "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." Upon hearing *this*, they entered into the temple about daybreak and *began* to teach.** (Vs. 17-21a)

So the family, the high priests were all Sadducees, the majority of the Council was Sadducees. They were much more the social, political sect versus the Pharisees, who were much more conservative and religious. And they're quite jealous of this movement that is rising up following these apostles. So they arrest them; they put them in jail. But in the middle of the night, an angel comes from God and busts them out. Now, I'm thinking Luke is writing this part of the story with a smile on his face, because one of the distinctives of the Sadducees is they did not believe in angels and demons. So the irony is, God then sends an angel to bust them out of jail. The angel then says, "Go...and never come back." I'm thinking if I were the apostles, that's what I would have wanted to hear, "Go, run for the hills! Don't ever come back." But that's *not* what the angel says, "*Go, stand, and teach.*" The word **stand** is a military term, (go, stand your ground, keep teaching). So basically, when the sun comes up, they're right back in the temple courtyard, and they're teaching again.

**Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, (so now they're including the Pharisees) and sent *orders* to the prison house for them to be brought in. But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, saying, "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside." Now when the captain of the temple *guard* and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" Then the captain went along with the officers and *proceeded* to bring them *back* without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).**

(Vs. 21b-26)

Now the Sadducees call in the Pharisees; the full Council meets. They're going to have the apostles brought before them. They're going to rough them up a little bit; they're going to tell them to shut up and send them on the way. But word comes back. "We don't know exactly how to explain this, but the jail is completely locked; the guards are all in place, but the jail is empty." It says they were **perplexed**. The Greek word means, what we would say, "at wit's end". They have no idea what's going to happen next; that's basically what they said, "Did these people disappear? Did they run to the hills? Will we ever see them again?" But the next word, being *but*, tells us they never

imagined what they're about to hear. Notice the way that's worded, **The men whom you put in prison, are standing** (There's the word the angel used.), they're standing **in the temple and teaching the people**. So this is just the next morning. They're right back where they were, and they're teaching again. So they go back; they get them; they bring them back to the Council. It's interesting that Luke tells us that the officers were concerned for their own safety. The people now favored the apostles. What it's telling us is, if at any moment, the apostles would have resisted, they could have easily started a riot that may have ended badly for a lot of people. But that isn't what this is. This isn't a power struggle. They respected the authority, and they went with them.

One of the interesting questions to ask of the text is, "What was the point of breaking them out of prison?" In other words, they're released in the middle of the night by the angel. First thing in the morning, they're back teaching, and almost immediately, they're captured and brought back. So, if that's the way the story is going to go, why not just leave them in prison and let them have a night's sleep? What's the point of breaking them out? The message is not: "Anytime you're in jail, I'll get you out." It's not, "If you're captured, nothing will happen to you," because that's not the way this story is going to go. These men are going to be beat up; they're going to be imprisoned. Ultimately, they will all be executed for the cause of Christ, except probably John, but all of them in and out of prison and tortured in many different ways.

So I think the message is—the greater theme of this part of Acts—and that is: *you can't stop this!* God wanted these apostles and their fellow believers to know, "If I want you out of jail, I'll get you out of jail." Just the way it's written, there's no drama; there are no details. God sends an angel, and out you go. So the message was, "If I want you out of jail, I'll get you out of jail." The apostle Paul would sit in a Roman prison for two years, but with the awareness, "There must be some reason God wants me here. If he needed me out, He'd get me out, because you can't stop this!" So they needed to understand that, because there were a lot of challenging days ahead. Verse 27:

**When they brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." (Vs. 27-28)**

One of the interesting things to note is these religious leaders can't bring themselves to say the name Jesus. **This man**, that's how they refer to Him. I think if I was the high priest, my first question would have been, "How did You do it? How did you bust out?" But the first thing they talk about is, **"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching."**

Jewish law required, for the common person, that there was a warning before there could be punishment. So that's probably what's happening here. "Wait a minute! We called you in; we warned you; we gave you strict orders you can't do that." So since they've continued to do it, then they're subject to punishment. They're also complaining to Peter, "Not only have you spread this name all over Jerusalem, but essentially you're blaming us for His death!" The people now were on the side of the apostles, and they were not happy that their religious Council had executed their Messiah. So the tide of popular opinion is turning against them. "Stop telling people we did it!"

Now, this is a very different tune from what we heard a couple of months previous to this. If you remember the back and forth between this Council and Pontius Pilate, there was this political maneuvering. Pilate didn't really want to execute Jesus, and back and forth they went. But eventually this Council stands before Pilate and says, "Let His blood be upon us and our children." So this is only a couple of months later, and they're trying to say, "Hey, don't blame us. We didn't do it." But Peter is not backing down. Verse 29:

**But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." (What he should have said right there is, "We told you that...we told you that!") "The God of our fathers (meaning the God of Israel) raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Vs. 29-32)**

In verse 30, when he's talking about God raising up Jesus, I don't think that's a reference to the resurrection. I think it's the idea that God raised up the long-awaited Messiah. He presented Him to you, and what did you do? You killed Him! As a matter of fact, the Greek in that sentence is very strong. Not only did they kill Him, but they required Him to be executed on a Roman cross. The Old Testament law said, "Cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree," which is a reference to a cross. It wasn't enough that the Sanhedrin wanted Jesus dead. If that was the case, they could have stoned Him. They wanted Him cursed! And that's why they were so insistent that the Romans execute Him on a cross. So Peter is not backing down. If anything, he's ratcheting things up. "Actually, you did kill Him, and you insisted that He be cursed by hanging on a cross. But then God has raised Him up, exalted Him. He sits at the right hand of God **as the Prince and the Savior.**" **Prince** has to do with the idea of power, but it's also a Greek word that references *originator*. So, this is the Messiah that God raised up. He did His work; He returned to the Father, and He is the originator, the **Prince**, who is launching this movement we call the Church. He is both the Prince and the Savior. What Peter says next to them is actually quite remarkable. What Peter says is, "Yes, you are guilty. This is what you did to God's Messiah. But if you're willing to repent and seek forgiveness, God will forgive your sins and grant you salvation."

I know there are some of you, maybe many of you, and you struggle with accepting the forgiveness of God. You look at your past; you look at your sins; you look at the messes you've made, and you struggle to believe it could actually be forgiven and you can just move on. Well stop and think about this. *What could possibly be more offensive to God than the fact that you tortured and executed His Son?* "What could you possibly do to me that would be more hurtful and more offensive than to torture and execute one of my children?" This is what they did to God's Son, yet because of the grace and mercy of God, what Peter is saying is, "That is true; that is what you did. But if you're willing to repent and seek God's forgiveness, God will forgive your sins and offer you His salvation." Just imagine how different the rest of this story in the book of Acts might have been if, in that moment, the Sanhedrin would have said, "You're right, we repent, and we ask God's forgiveness." Just imagine that! But, rather what happened is what often happens today. The suggestion that they had sinned, therefore they needed to repent, *made them furious*. Verse 33:

**But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.**

Cut to the quick; literally, sawn in two. They were furious! “How dare you suggest that we have sinned, and that we need to repent, in order to experience God's forgiveness?”

This is very similar to what often happens in our culture today. Oftentimes the message of the gospel is met, not just with resistance, but with anger. “How dare you suggest that I have sinned, that I need to repent, and that I need a Savior. It used to be in our communities, that there was a shared sense of morality. And typically, that morality grew out of the Scriptures. But by and large people agreed, that for a community to function together in the best interest of everyone, there are certain moral issues that we agree with. So in a sense, it created a boundary. So when people stepped outside of the boundary, the community together would say, “You're outside the boundary. For the good of everyone, you need to step back in the boundary.” But then things began to change, and what began to happen was, if someone steps out of the boundary, and someone points that out, *they simply move the boundary out*. “There, now I'm still in the boundary!” But over the last ten years or so, we've continued to change, to where now there simply *are no boundaries*. The great virtue in our culture today is to be true to *yourself*, and the great sin is to deny someone *their true longings and desires*.

We're going all the way back to Genesis 3, the lie of the serpent: *You* can be God, and *you* decide what's right and wrong. So when someone comes along and suggests that you are a sinner and need to repent and seek forgiveness, people are furious. “How dare you? You're so judgmental. Who are you to say I'm a sinner? And who are you to say I need to repent, to experience God's forgiveness.” But here's the deal, and this is a pretty important deal. *God hasn't moved his boundaries*...God hasn't moved His boundaries! And when we step out of God's boundaries, it is offensive to God, and it is sin—and that sin separates you from a holy God. Unless you acknowledge that sin and repent and seek God's forgiveness, you will be separated from God forever. God is gracious and merciful, and longs to grant you His forgiveness and His salvation. But you have to be willing to acknowledge that this is sin. It's offensive to God, and I need to repent and seek God's salvation.

The Council is furious. They intend to kill all 12 apostles. Verse 34:

**But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away *some* people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”** (Vs. 34-39)

Gamaliel was without question, the most significant, influential Pharisee of his day. The Pharisees were a minority, but Gamaliel was highly respected. He understands that the Sadducees are furious, and they are about to create a bloodbath, so he's trying to stop that. So the apostles are dismissed,

and he reminds them of two historical examples that flared up and went away. If this is merely of man, it'll go away. Leave it alone. But if it is of God, you can't stop this. You can't! It's interesting how many commentators feel the need to dissect and analyze what Gamaliel said. I don't think he's speaking deep philosophy. I think he understands there's about to be a bloodbath, and he's trying to stop it. So he's arguing in a way that would make sense to the Sadducees. There are some New Testament scholars such as Ben Witherington, and F.F. Bruce, who believe that the grammar in Gamaliel's statement indicates he does favor the idea that this is from God. He's seen enough that he's starting to think this may actually be from God, and if we aren't careful, we're going to end up fighting against God.

That's very interesting to think about, as a Church. I think we would all agree, we would never want to be guilty of fighting against God. But we need to think this through a little bit. There are many different churches in our community. There are those churches that call themselves Christian churches but deny many of the fundamentals of the faith. You can't do that. You can't be a Christian church and deny the fundamentals. But beyond that, there're many churches of different flavors, different denominations, different ways of doing things, and we all agree and are united around the fundamentals of the faith—things that you have to believe to be a Christian Church. We agree on the authority of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the resurrection of Christ, the deity of Christ. There's a whole list of primary doctrines that we would call the fundamentals of the faith around which we unite. But it's also true that there are what we call secondary doctrines. These are the things in Scripture—they're not as clear; you can't be as dogmatic about—that good, godly people disagree about. So we see them as more secondary issues. These could be things like mode of baptism, something like whether or not the charismatic gifts are still active, end-times theology, women's role in the church, how a church is governed and run. There are churches that have different distinctives, different flavors, that are different in these secondary issues, but absolutely united on the fundamentals of the faith. Those are true churches of Jesus Christ. If we don't understand the difference between what is primary, and what is secondary, we start thinking, everything is primary, and we're right about everything, and everyone else is wrong. When you end up there, strangely enough, *you end up fighting against God and what God is blessing*.

We have never said we're the only church in town. We have never said we think we're the best church in town. We have only said, we are part of *The Church* in town. As a matter of fact, every week, we diligently pray for other churches in our city, understanding they're brothers and sisters with whom we lock arms to represent the church in our city. I believe as things get more and more difficult for the church, in our culture, it will become more and more important that the true Church of Jesus Christ come together and lock arms to be a light in the darkness. But there's also a reality that those churches who see everything as primary, and they're right, and everybody else is wrong, they will isolate themselves and they will die. We as a church would never want to be guilty of fighting against what God is blessing. Verse 40:

**They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. (Vs. 40-41)**

Verse 40 is interesting in the way it's worded. "So they took his advice and released them?" No! They flogged them! "They may be of God, so let's just flog them, then release them." The Sadducees had to save face somehow, so they flog them, and they're released. Flogging was no small thing, 39 lashes—typically 13 on the chest, 26 on the back. They would have been a bloodied mess. It was not unusual that people died in the process of being flogged. It was horrible! So they flogged them; they threatened them, and they released them. And the text says the apostles went away angry and bitter that Jesus didn't rescue them. Oh...wait a minute...that's not what it said. (*laughter.*) What it says is actually quite remarkable. *They went away rejoicing.* They were a bloody mess. *They went away rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ.* These were an amazing group of men, empowered by the Spirit of God! I love verse 42. This is the chapter in a nutshell.

**And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.**

They would have walked away a bloodied mess. But **every day, in the temple and from house to house, they continued to preach and teach that Jesus is the Christ.** You can't stop this! You can't! No government, no religious council, no health issue, no terrorists, no culture. You can't stop this...you can't! What Paul understood, sitting in a Roman prison cell, was that he had given his life to the church. And if he was to die, under the hand of Nero, he knew, at the end of the story, Jesus wins! The church triumphs! The future is glorious, and everything's going to be okay. So no matter what, he was content, he was rejoicing; he was not anxious. For he knew that he had given his life to something that will matter forever!

Years ago, when my girls were little, we would often go to a state park to go camping. It was a beautiful little park. It was immaculate; it had beautiful camping areas, had a ball field, had a children's playground, had a little lake that they would stock with trout in the fall and little paddle boats. It was beautiful, and we often camped there. But a couple of years ago, Patti and I were coming back from a motorcycle trip and decided just to stop at this park to stretch our legs. It was overgrown; it was weedy. The equipment was broken; the campsites were overgrown; the pond was covered with moss. Frankly, it was a bit of a dump. It was just a good reminder: Nothing in this world lasts—it just doesn't! We are clear on this, aren't we? Your house isn't going to last. Your business isn't going to last. Your farm's not going to last. None of that's going to last. Can you imagine getting to the end of your life and watching everything that you've lived for slowly fade away?

Think how different that is, if you've given your life to the things that ultimately matter. No matter what, you know what's true, and you've given your life to something that will still matter a thousand years from now. So we're talking about giving our lives to the church. Some of you may think, "Oh that poor church, poor Berean. You know, it's been a hard year and they probably don't have enough people to help with their ministries, and they're getting desperate and they're trying to talk people into serving." It's not that at all! As a matter of fact, the last year has been an amazing year! It's been a really productive ministry year, and amazing things have happened. And that's happened because every weekend there's an amazing army of people who have showed up to make it happen. We've had children's ministry; we've had youth ministry; we've had ministry every weekend—and God's done amazing things! God has done amazing things because Berean has amazing people.

And once again, they have risen to the occasion. We're not desperate; that's not what it is at all. I just want to be clear on this. When you choose to get involved and pour yourself into that which will matter forever, you're not doing us a favor. That's not what it is. We're just telling you that God has granted you this amazing invitation to be part of something that ultimately will triumph and will still matter a thousand years from now. When I give my life to the things that matter, no matter what, I can be content. I can rejoice. I don't need to be anxious. At the end of the story, Jesus wins. I know that! His Church triumphs. I know that! And I know no matter what, everything's going to be okay. This is why we compel you to join us, as we *Dare to be the Church*.

*Our Father, we celebrate that You have called us to be part of something that will matter forever. Lord, nobody in this room wants to waste his or her life. Lord, may we be clear about what ultimately matters. Lord, may we be Your church? In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## WINTER 2021 // WEEK 10

### Life Group Questions

Acts: Daring To Be The Church // March 20-21, 2021

You Can't Stop This // Acts 5:12-42

## Introduction

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This week in Acts, God continues to add more people to the early church, the followers of Jesus continue to speak to others about Jesus and more opposition arises. It is clear to us that God is at work in the lives of the followers of Jesus, but some people find themselves opposing God. We need to remember that every circumstance can be a platform to speak about Jesus.

We hope your experience in Life Group provides a foundation of scripture and connection that gives you the courage to face challenges to your faith these days. If you have time, try to work through these questions on your own before meeting with your group.

## Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

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Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. If you had to change your first name, what name would you choose and why?
  
2. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were very sure of something, but were later proved wrong? Explain what happened and how you responded.

## Getting Started

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Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
    - b. For openness to what you're learning together
    - c. For friendships to deepen and grow
  - 2) Invite someone to read the passage in the group.
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## Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) This passage is a great example of the truth that the Holy Spirit is always at work—sometimes behind the scenes, other times in more overt ways. In this passage we see 4 different responses to the work of the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Jealousy/opposition (the high priest and his associates)
  - b. Obedience/embracing (the apostles and young church)
  - c. Confusion (the temple guards were perplexed)
  - d. Wait and See (Gamaliel)

It is interesting that the apostles never oppose anything that happens to them in this passage. In all that happens they continue to embrace their circumstances as from God. **Why might we tend to think hard things that happen in our lives are not of God?**

**Is it possible that you are opposing something in your life that is actually from God?**

**How might you look to God in your situation instead of opposing Him or looking for another way out?**

- 2) For many of us reciting verses and preparing to speak publicly about our faith can be overwhelming, but we all have times when we can share a story about how knowing Jesus has made a difference in our lives. **On a scale of 1-10 (10 being very bold), how bold are you about your relationship with Jesus? Why did you give yourself the number you chose?**
- 3) **Have you had an experience where you had the opportunity to share about your relationship with Jesus but were too timid? Would you be willing to share how you felt during and after this experience?**

What are the reasons you do not speak about Jesus at times in your life?

When the reasons above cause us to feel timid what truths do we need to remember that will encourage us to speak about Jesus?

- 4) Have you had a moment of boldness in your life when you spoke about your relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share about this experience with your group?
  
- 5) How does it affect your determination and courage when you know, no matter what, Jesus wins and His church will prevail?

If you would like to learn more about opportunities to witness or participate in God's kingdom in Lincoln and around the world, contact [outreach@lincolnberean.org](mailto:outreach@lincolnberean.org) or checkout this Facebook Group: [www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnbereanlocal](https://www.facebook.com/groups/lincolnbereanlocal)

### **Prayer** *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

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Think of someone in your life who does not know Jesus. Would you be willing to share a bit about their life and your relationship with them?

Take a few moments to pray together. Ask for boldness to speak about Jesus. Pray for God to give you favor with the people you mentioned and ask Him to open their hearts to the gospel.

If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say "Amen" aloud, signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.