

ACTS

Part 14 – The Honor of Being Dishonored for Jesus

Acts 5:33-42

Main Idea: Suffering dishonor for the sake of Jesus is a position of honor and reason for joy.

It is a paradox of the Christian life that suffering can coexist with joy. For the Christian, joy need not wait for sorrow to disappear. In the final passage of Acts 5 we witness the apostles suffer public humiliation and great physical suffering for the sake of “the name,” that is, Jesus. Having not been dissuaded by the Sanhedrin’s power or threats the apostles continue to do that which the authorities had ordered them not to do. But as Peter explained to them, they were those who “must obey God rather than men.” This world-defying obedience to God is costly. It brings about dishonor as well as physical suffering. But it is glory to be dishonored for the sake of Jesus.

The text being preached today is a brief narrative covering the Sanhedrin’s outrage over Peter’s bold gospel proclamation, Gamaliel’s appeal for cooler heads, the beating of the apostles, and their surprising response.

1. The Gospel is hated.

Vv. 29-33

The Sanhedrin’s response to Peter’s gospel proclamation (vv. 29-32) is swift: “When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them” (vs. 33).

The response of the Jewish religious authorities is an example of the world’s attitude toward the gospel. There are specific reasons why the gospel is hated which transcend time and culture. The gospel is foolishness and weakness to those who are perishing for at least three reasons:

a) The gospel is hated because it calls for repentance from sin.

- In verses 29-32 Peter confronts the Sanhedrin with the claims of the gospel. A necessary part of the gospel, which is often missed today is its confrontation with our sin. Notice how Peter charges the Sanhedrin with killing Jesus (vs. 30). He also tells them that Jesus came “to give repentance.” This is good news indeed but for the one who cannot tolerate being told he must repent, it is an offense.

b) The gospel is hated because it recognizes only one Lord.

- Vs. 31 – “God exalted him at his right hand as *Leader...*” The gospel proclaims both the salvation and the rule of Jesus. From the beginning, Christians have been those who confess that Jesus is Lord. And in a society where either Caesar is lord or the exalted self is lord, the human heart will brook no rivals.

c) The gospel is hated because it recognizes only one Savior.

- Vs. 31 – “God exalted him at his right hand as *Leader and Savior...*” This is perhaps the most infuriating element of the gospel: That salvation comes through the dying and rising of Christ *alone*.

2. Man’s wisdom is limited.

Vv. 34-39

Gamaliel was a highly revered member of the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee. He as the successor to the revered Hillel. Gamaliel had earned respect as one of the wisest and most knowledgeable members of the ruling

counsel. For this reason, the Sanhedrin listens to his counsel. Gamaliel's call for cooler heads to prevail is followed, at least partially. But Gamaliel's counsel demonstrates the futility of human wisdom.

What Gamaliel got right:

- God's work will ultimately prevail.
- Sin will ultimately come to nothing.
- Nothing less than Jesus' resurrection could sustain the Christian movement.
- It is foolish to be on the wrong side of God's work.

However, while Gamaliel's advice seems wise at first it is ultimately flawed. It is true that God's purposes ultimately triumph. None of God's purposes can fail. But there certainly are times in this life when evil *seems* to win. Likewise, God does not always cause the good to prosper on every occasion. This is a frequent lament in the Psalms. Also, Gamaliel's wait and see approach is entirely pragmatic. The gospel calls forth a response of believe and follow not wait and see. That attitude will never lead to joyful suffering for the sake of Jesus.

3. Suffering for Jesus is cause for joy.

Vv. 40-41

Even though the Sanhedrin was persuaded not to kill the apostles they nevertheless had them beaten. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul's catalogue of sufferings includes mention of having been beaten five times with the "forty lashes less one" (11:24). It appears to have been the practice to beat the offender twice on the back and once on the chest and repeat until the 39 lashes was reached. This was done publically thus, quite literally, adding insult to injury. In a shame based culture, public dishonor is all the more painful.

"What transformed pain into joy and disgrace into glory was the name for which they suffered – the name of Jesus which the Sanhedrin wanted to silence." – Dennis Johnson

And yet, "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (vs. 41). Notice that there is no glossing over the real physical suffering and public dishonor endured by the apostles. These men were no Gnostics who denied the reality of physical suffering. Nor were they masochists who derived pleasure from suffering. Rather their joy was grounded in the knowledge that their sufferings and public dishonor were the fruits of faithfulness to Christ.

4. Courageous obedience is better than cowardly compromise.

Vs. 42 – "And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."

The apostles continue to do that which God commanded and the worldly authorities have prohibited. Once again we see a theme that recurs in Acts: The advance of the Word of God as the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work. There is a comprehensiveness captured in verse 42: The apostles continued preaching every day and everywhere. To do likewise will certainly give Christians today the same opportunity to know the honor of being dishonored for Jesus.