

15—Acts 5.17-42—The Cost to Follow Jesus

- I. Introduction
 - a. When I read a story like the Hobbit, I walk away with a new desire to have courage. As some of you may know that story is about halflings or Hobbits. Hobbits love the quiet life...their gardens...their routines...doing nothing unexpected...and hate the idea of adventure and risk taking.
 - b. Yet, the story is about a fearful Hobbit named Bilbo who goes on an adventure despite everything in his world saying no. But he misses life as it was. When faced with danger, he is afraid but also courageous. He longs to return home but pushes on because he made a promise. The book and movies give us an inside look at Bilbo's struggles yet we see him press on for some reason. One of those reasons is that he values loyalty. He continues to prove himself only to be knocked down by the more powerful Thorin. Yet, it's Thorin who eventually comes around to see the courage of Bilbo emerge when fears engulf him.
 - c. Followers of Jesus are often like Bilbo. Indeed, I want to be like him too. Amid my on fears and failures, I hope courage will peek through the darkness and Jesus will use me...us...to advance his Kingdom. Just know, that's what I want even when I tremble.
 - d. I hope this scene will cause us to walk away with a renewed desire to be courageous for the Kingdom as you watch these common folk trust the Lord among fears in a dangerous world.
- II. Main Point
 - a. Throughout this scene, we will see over and over the contrast between Christ's authority vs. the authority of men, in particular all the leaders of Israel. The point is, the risen Christ is reigning from heaven over the advancement of his Kingdom through his apostles in a dangerous world. It cannot be stopped.
 - b. See the courage of these followers of Jesus.
- III. Outline
 - a. The Jealousy of Israel's Leaders
 - b. The cost to follow (arrested, released, sent back to preach)
 - c. The Perplexed and fearful Leaders
 - d. The cost of obedience (rearrested, questioned, continuing to preach)
 - e. The Enraged leaders of Israel want to kill
 - f. Gamaliel persuades the out-of-control leaders to keep away and leave them alone
 - g. The cost of following is suffering but the preaching continues
- IV. Exposition
 - a. We first need to notice the contrast as to why the leaders here in v. 17 are filled with jealousy.
 - i. In verse 12-16, we heard that Christ's Kingdom continues to advance as the church was preserved through the decisive work of Christ in the attack from within the church.
 1. Great fear settled upon them and the church that deals with sin within her midst becomes more useful, not less.
 2. Signs and wonders are being displayed through the apostles. This new exodus is continuing as Jesus works through them in a wicked and perverse generation to essentially say to sin and satan—let my people go!
 3. And as the text makes clear, (Acts 5:14) And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.
 - ii. As you might recall, these same leaders had commanded that they stop teaching in this name.
 1. Upon being ordered to stop, the apostles gathered with the church and prayed that they might be filled with the Holy Spirit to continue to speak the gospel boldly.
 - a. So, those filled with the Holy Spirit continue to speak the word of God.
 - b. Those filled with jealousy arrest those who are drawing multitudes of people through the preaching the gospel.
 - c. So, why are they jealous? Well, what is jealousy anyway?

- a. No, the angel releases them for the purpose of continuing to be witnesses in Jerusalem.
- b. This angel delivers a message from King Jesus--(Acts 5:20) "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."
 - i. Go and speak are the commands. Standing in the temple is clear sign of defiance and victory.
 - ii. Their message is for "this life." It is a message to believe now. It is a message to be obeyed now. It is a message for this life and the life to come.
- c. But how will the apostles respond? (Acts 5:21) And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.
 - i. They are sent to do very thing that caused them to be arrested in the first place.
 - ii. They didn't lay low until all of this blew over or move to a different area.
 - iii. What Jesus commands is superior to everything else, no matter the cost.
- d. What will this continued obedience cost the apostles? Did the angel say, here's my contact information...call me if this happens again? No promises are given.
 - i. It could be like this to the church in Smyrna: (Rev. 2:10)¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 - ii. The life of a witness for Christ has many certainties.
 - 1. One is this--(Jn. 16:33) In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
 - 2. Another is this--(Lk. 21:17-19)¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.
 - iii. That's what it might cost to follow Jesus. He doesn't promise comfort now, but later.
- c. Now, it's the next morning there in the middle of v. 21. The jealous leaders subsided their anger by arresting the apostles. But their assurance is short lived. These powerful men find themselves perplexed and fearful.
 - i. The all the leading authorities assemble together. They send for their prisoners who are locked up in a public prison...
 - ii. Another contrast shows up in v. 22—But when officers came, they did not find them in the prison.
 - 1. It's almost comical. They are ready for court but they can't find their prisoners.
 - a. It's funny because they find the prison securely locked.
 - b. The guards are standing there guarding an empty public cell. They have been standing at the door but when the door is opened, no one is inside.
 - 2. How will they respond? They are greatly perplexed.
 - a. Perplexed has the idea of scattered. In other words, they didn't know what to think. They didn't know where they were or how they had gotten out.
 - iii. Another contrast pops up in v. 25. They don't know but some bystander knows where they are.
 - 1. (Acts 5:25) But someone came and reported to them, "The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

- a. Still teaching! Never not teaching! The whereabouts and the courageous obedience of the apostles are confirmed. They are exactly where Christ sent them and they are doing exactly as they were instructed.
 - 2. Finding the apostles in open defiance causes fear among the captain and his officers.
 - a. Notice in v.26 how they bring the apostle back to court—but not by force!
 - b. Normally, those who escaped in that day were stoned but in this scene they authorities are afraid they might be stoned.
 - c. To further amplify their fear, notice the high priest does not ask them how they escaped. It's as though they are afraid to ask. They don't want to think about how that happened. It would reveal even further how powerless they are.
- iv. The high priest gives us some insightful information.
 - 1. I think we see why they are jealous.
 - a. We strictly charged you NOT to teach in his name.
 - i. They disobeyed their command.
 - b. Also, the spirit-filled apostles have filled Jerusalem with YOUR teaching.
 - i. Note: your teaching, not OUR teaching.
 - c. And finally, he claims the apostles intend to bring this name's blood upon us.
 - i. But is this statement true? People often think they know what someone desire is. The apostles have not shrunk back from stating that the leaders killed Jesus.
 - 1. But do the apostles want them punished for it? Arrested? Crucified? God to strike them dead? Is that what the apostles desire?
- d. The apostles' consistent plea has been, "repent." And this message continues to cost them. Obedience to Jesus cost them again.
 - i. They are rearrested. They are questioned by the authorities as we just saw.
 - ii. Again, another contrast shows up in v. 29--(Acts 5:29) ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.
 - 1. In other words, Peter says you commanded us to stop but we obey God rather than you.
 - a. They do this no matter the cost. Why? Because these leaders and the people of Jerusalem need what they have to offer—forgiveness of their sins in Jesus.
 - b. Hear Peter's plea--(Acts 5:30-31) ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
 - i. Peter makes clear this message is in keeping with the promises made by the God of OUR fathers.
 - ii. Yes, he points out again that they killed Jesus but God exalted him to his right hand as Leader and Savior.
 - 1. Dear leaders who have failed miserably. Jesus is the Leader, not you. But he's also the Savior. He offers you forgiveness even for taking his life.
 - c. The leaders are wrong about the apostles wanting his blood to be on their heads. No...he wants them to be washed by the blood they have spilled.
 - iii. Often people will be wrong about your motives. The outward signs are only part of the picture. They see your struggles like poor Bilbo. The cost to follow is enormous but worth it. But your heart's desire is like that of Paul's in Romans.
 - 1. (Rom. 9:1-3) I am speaking the truth in Christ-- I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

- ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
2. You will be misunderstood. This motive isn't normal. But this is our heart's desire.
 - iv. The leaders have been jealous and perplexed and afraid. Proverbs told us it doesn't stop there. Yes, the message of Christ insights them to rage and they want to kill them.
 1. That's what it costs to obey Jesus in this world. But to those who obey, God has given them the Holy Spirit.
 - e. The cost isn't over but we will return to that in a moment. But first how will they escape this death sentence by these enraged leaders?
 - i. A Pharisee named Gamaliel speaks up.
 - ii. He orders the apostles to be taken out briefly.
 - iii. He commands these out-of-control leaders to take care what they are about to do.
 1. He seems to have put two and two together. They may have not asked how they got out of jail but that doesn't mean no one thought about it.
 2. They may not have wondered how courageous it was to defy their orders and teach the gospel standing in the temple just around the corner but someone took notice.
 3. I can tell you, it's not great miracles that move people's hearts. It's simple, common folk gladly obeying Jesus and counting the cost of following and doing it anyway no matter the cost.
 - iv. These things give Gamaliel pause. He gives two former examples that both ended and came to nothing.
 1. He says these were of men, not of God. And if they are not of God they will end.
 - v. However, if this is of God you cannot overthrow them. You will be opposing God!
 1. They take his advice.
 - f. Yet, more suffering for the apostles. The One who could stop this does not intervene.
 - i. They call the apostles in. They beat them, literally flog them—the 39 lashes. It is a painful and severe beating. One that causes some to die.
 - ii. They send them away bloody but the apostles respond in a very unnatural way.
 1. The left the council bleeding but rejoicing that they have bleed for the One who bleed for them.
 2. They strangely think it is an honor to be dishonored.
 - a. They do exactly as Jesus had taught them in (Matt. 5:11-12) ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
 - iii. You know if they leave rejoicing, they have no plans to obey their persecutors.
 1. Notice what they do: (Acts 5:42) ⁴² And every day, in the temple (right under their nose in open sight) and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

V. Response

- a. Let us too be courageous to speak the gospel in this dangerous world and fill Goodlettsville and beyond with the good news of Jesus.