

The Reaction: Jealous Opposition Acts 5:17-21

We have seen so much in this chapter already. We have seen the supernatural deaths of both Ananias and Sapphira, and then we have seen the apostles preaching and the miracles that were done through their hands. We have seen some of the people stay away from trusting in Christ and others drawn toward the truth and trust in him. And we realize as we read the account of the book of Acts, this is actual history. This is the actual beginning of the church of Jesus Christ. And we learn so much about the functionality and the purpose of the church through the Book of Acts. In fact, when people are often in trouble or when their life turns in a very negative direction, some people turn to the church for direction. But here is the question: what message are they given? Does that message have anything to do with the message, is it parallel or the same message we see in the opening chapters of this book? This book not only shows us the beginning of the church but what the church is and what the church does.

And as we come to verse 17 and following and look at the response of the religious leaders it is really perplexing, because it is a response that we truly would not expect and cannot understand or comprehend on one level. Isn't it true? We can understand the response in verse 13, **"None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem."** None dared join them. They saw this couple struck down by God because of a lie they spoke to God and others. You get a sense of the holiness of God and his presence and it sends a fear in the deepest recesses of the heart. God is not safe. Keep your distance. Don't go near them. The other you see is that others held them in high esteem. And the ones here they hold those in high esteem are those who preach the message of Christ, and this message was validated to them by these signs and wonders. We realize the apostles are sinners like us but they are the instrument that the glories and message of Jesus comes through. Some were kept away and fearful, others were drawn near in such an awe of the grace and beauty of the resurrected Christ. They realized Jesus is the king of the kingdom.

And when light, stunning light breaks in there is always going to be a response of darkness, even if that response makes no sense. If you preach Christ and testify to others of their need of him, if you seek to love the unloveable and forgive others the way Christ forgave you, the greater the light you shine, the greater a response will be by those who love their sin. The amazing thing about the book of Acts is it explains both belief and unbelief. It just does not give one side of the picture. It gives us the truth of Ananias and Sapphira. It gives both sides. We have seen the positive side of belief. Individuals have come face and to face with the reality of the holiness of God and it has created a fear in them. That leads secondly to a willingness to hear and believe the gospel message, and thirdly this is all done through the enabling of the Spirit of God who immerses them into the body of Christ called the church.

But this morning I want us to look at the other side, and that is unbelief - what it looks like and why it exists. It is important we understand the face of unbelief. We often pray for God's blessing and when it comes and almost every time it comes, it will bring a reaction from this world and we should expect it. And the response always has to do with our relationship with Jesus. People hate Jesus and therefore they hate his people. But also, as we learn about unbelief we start to learn about our unbelief that still

remains in the recesses of our hearts, why we can't follow Christ here or there, or obey him here, forgive there, be patient over there. We learn so much, and we also learn how to treat others and testify to others when we understand their response to the preaching of Jesus Christ. So I want us to see two things this morning. I want us to see the problem, and then I want us to see the response that we might face the unbelief of others and flight unbelief in ourselves through faith in Christ.

1. We need to see the problem of unbelief. V. 17-18.

It is amazing how Jesus doesn't fit into our box, and people will try to say they are acting rational in rejecting Christ; that it is just a fact that modern people no longer believe in Jesus. And that argument would hold weight if everyone in the ancient world believed on Jesus. We could say because of scientific development our intellect indicates that these things are not true. But the fact is that people in the ancient world rejected Jesus also. This is not something new. Unbelief has always been with us, and its cause has always been the same. Men love something else rather than Jesus, and if Jesus is who he says he is then their lives have to change. If you are rejecting Jesus this morning, you are coming up with all kinds of reasons why you should reject him, and you are trying to appease your mind. But the real reason is not because you are intellectually superior. It is because you want something that Jesus threatens. Be honest about how He threatens what you truly love.

And again, look at the start of verse 17, "**But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees).**" Notice the first word of this verse. It is a contrast to the reaction of so many others who were amazed, transfixed, trouble and even fearful. And we can imagine these kinds of responses when you see the judgment of God against hypocrisy and two people fall dead, or see all these people being healed instantly of these maladies. But here we are given another response and reaction. And it is by the high priest, who might have been Caiaphas or Annas. It was one of the two. He was joined by all who were with him, and this would have been many or the majority of the Sanhedrin who were responsible for the execution of Jesus. And notice the ones who were with him were of the party of the Sadducees.

Now the high priest was always taken from the Sadducees. And they were the theological liberals of the day. They did not believe in miracles. And they did not believe in the resurrection. They taught like many liberals today that the miracles of the Old Testament were analogies of faith — to help us believe in God or teach us moral lessons but they did not really happen. They were known as the caretakers of the nation who had power and prestige, and they looked at the people to follow them. They were very highly educated. They thought when they executed Jesus that would be the end of that. They hated the fact that these uneducated fishermen or commoners were preaching and teaching the glories of God and the resurrection of Jesus. They could not comprehend or understand where they had gotten their knowledge and ability. But further, you can imagine how frustrating it was that the disciples were doing all of these signs and wonders before the people — the very thing they denied that God had done or would do is being done right under their noses in Jerusalem. And it was being done in the name of Jesus who they were preaching had risen from the grave. Here is proof that he is risen — look at these miracles — now believe in him for sins forgiven and life

eternal. Remember, they brought Jesus before Pilate. They beat Jesus and denied and mocked his Messiahship. Now these signs and wonders and all these people enthusiastically following Jesus and his apostles.

But here is the question: how did they respond? What did they do? Did they change their ways of their theology? And the answer is no. Was there not enough evidence? Was the man who was healed by the gate beautiful not available to be interviewed, or were the disciples not willing to be questioned? Were there no witnesses to these events? And we realize the answer to all these questions. We think because we have put a telescope into the skies and we can look further into space than ever before, or we can examine the DNA of a person under a microscope, or we can explain how plants can take carbon dioxide and turn it into oxygen that we are so sophisticated and so intellectual and so bright that we just cannot believe such things. But let me ask you: with all that scientific knowledge that you have, how do you explain the sin that you did last night? How do you explain that lie or lust or that outburst of anger that you had? Where did that come from?

I have heard it so many times: my rejection is just intellectual. I just cannot believe and be honest with myself. That kind of response makes huge assumptions. One is that no one who is bright has ever believed on Jesus. Yet, if you look through the scientific age, most of the greatest breakthroughs have come from Christian scientists. Hospitals have flourished under Christian believers because they believed this was a way to help our fellow man. Hospitals and medical breakthroughs are not for those who believe in the survival of the fittest. And if it is just intellectual you have to come to terms why some people trusted Christ, had the same reasons of why they did believe as you and even mocked others for believing, but now believe and follow Jesus.

If you are honest, and if we are all honest, the reason why we would ever stay away from Jesus is a heart problem. There is something that I want. The Sadducees wanted to be right. They wanted reputation and acclaim. They wanted position and comfort. And they realized they could not have this if Jesus is the Christ. They didn't want to turn from their sins. They loved the things that God detests. John 3:19-20 explains it so accurately, **“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”** We think so much has changed in the last two thousand years. And much has changed. But the nature of unbelief has not changed. People love darkness rather than light, so they hate the very light that would expose their sin and call them away from that sin to the hope of Jesus.

If you are rejecting Christ this morning, this is the very reason why you are rejecting him this morning. Be honest. You love something that cannot exist if you come to Christ. No one can have two masters. You will love one but hate the other. But here is the amazing thing: Christ right now is offering you something so far superior. Not only forgiveness but freedom from the very slavery that you are living in. He offers you so much more. You have to cut through the lies you tell yourself in order to see the nature of your heart before you ever see how great you need.

2. We need to see the response. Vv. 17-18.

There is always a response to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The question is: what will that response be. We have seen many through this chapter alone. We have seen hypocrisy, fear, awe and belief, and right here, probably the most surprising is anger and rejection. Although, when you understand the human heart it should not shock us. I have sat down with people many times and gone over their questions and struggles with Jesus, and the questions they say they need answers before they will believe, and have given them answers, and at the end of the conversations there is a response. Some have actually trusted in Christ. But others have rejected him. There is always a response.

And here you have the response of the religious leaders. Look and think about what is taking place and what is not, **“But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.”** The meaning of “rose up,” is they had a response to all that was being done through the apostles. And think, they were the most learned men of their day. They were trained in the Scriptures and they were trained in argumentation. On the other side are these common and uneducated men. Certainly the easiest thing to do would be to debate them, but that is not what they did. They arrested all of the apostles and threw them into a common prison, no doubt waiting till the morning where they could formally charge them and execute them and be done with this Jesus once and for all. Their tactics have not changed.

Now think what was driving these men. This is what I love about Scripture because it can inform us of things we would never know. Here it is what is driving the Sadducees to arrest the apostles and put them into prison. And it is not logic or care for the people or all the damage they are doing, but as the text indicates it was **“jealousy.”** Jealousy is something that is inside a person that finds after a while an expression outside. It is looking at someone and seeing what they have and truly wishing that you had it also. And as jealousy grows it causes the person to not only want what someone has but truly believe I deserve it so much more than that person. It breeds hatred and bitterness and animosity toward the person or people who have it.

Now there is an appropriate jealousy. We realize God is jealous for his own glory. And we are to have a jealousy or zeal to want to see God glorified. But this jealousy here is different. It is directed toward self rather than God and his glory. This is about me. The people are suppose to look in reverence not at God but me. Remember verse 13, **“None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.”** They held who in high esteem? The apostles. The people were coming to them, listening to them, being taught by them, and they were believing and responding to their message. Listen to verse 14, **“And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”** The popularity of these preachers was just gaining steam. People who used to sit at their feet were enthusiastically follow Jesus and listening to these men. All those years of education. All those letters behind their names. I finally get this authoritative position and they are listening to these uneducated and backward men. And then they are preaching in a name that we commanded them not to preach in, that person we executed and rejected!

There is no humility in this jealousy. Some versions translate the word “jealousy” as anger or rage to really give he sense of the hostility. Proud people hate Jesus. Pride

is driving them, not rational arguments. They want to be right. They will shout louder rather than truly look and see. And you can imagine how frustrating this must have been for them in their unwillingness to look at Jesus whom they crucified. They say there is no resurrection or miracles, and yet all these miracles are being done in the name of the resurrected Jesus. And it is a bit comical in this passage because they do not believe or they deny the miraculous, they will not bring themselves to believe that God can do what he wants, so they arrest the apostles and that puts an end to that, but as we will see, an angel of the Lord actually sets them free to keep preaching the gospel. Well, we don't believe in angels. Well a heavenly messenger sent from God came and set them free with a commission to keep preaching Christ. And the anger and the jealousy just increase. There is no thought of intellectual debate, but anger and hatred and rage because of what is going on the human heart. Pride is driving unbelief.

And people say, well I do not believe in Jesus, and we are living in a different time because people do not respond like they used to. The rejection is different. We don't put people in prison for preaching Jesus and we do not execute them for making know the gospel. But is the emotions and the heart attitude any different? I mean the atheist says he does not believe in God, but here is the question: why is he or she so angry with Jesus? If God does not exist you cannot be angry with a non-entity. I am never angry that Superman did not come to my rescue, because Superman does not exist. Yet, the amount of ink that is spilt by so called atheists on the Christian Jesus is just amazing. You think they are jealous of all those following Christ.

Why is there such anger? It is because people love sin and therefore hate Jesus. It is simply if you love this then you will hate what is opposed to it. And that hatred is alive and well. If you have someone who wants to engage in a certain sin today the Scriptures call sin against God, people will applaud that person. They will seek to elevate him or her. You can see this with a host of sexual sins today. But the moment you say that God has called us to moral purity, and there is freedom in living the way God wants us to live, you will not only be opposed — you will be hated. Others will not want to debate you but silence you. The moment you say salvation is found in Jesus alone, and you must turn from you sin and trust in him and he is the only way, you and your views must be put down. This is the same response we see right here in chapter five. Nothing in the rebellious human heart has changed.

If this describes you this morning, do you realize what you really are opposing? You are not opposing this pastor or your parents or some ancient philosophy. What were these men opposing? Look at the beginning of verse 28, **“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name.”** They cannot even bring themselves to say the name of Jesus. After everything that has happened and everything that has been preached, and all the lives that have been changed does this really seem rational? I could understand if the message preached was about the tyrant God who wants to make you life awful and wants to fill you with so many burdens and he will never be satisfied with you, and all he does is seek to condemn you. But that is not the message. The message and reason why Jesus came is for you. John 3:16 says, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** That is the Jesus you are opposing. He came to save a person like you.

I often feel sorry for people who continue in unbelief because they dupe themselves into believing that they have so much more of a greater life and happiness, and yet it is the believer that has it. Listen to the words of Jesus of why Jesus came, **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”** (John 10:10) My desire is you would lay down your burdens. You would not just see your sin but see him and come to him. See the true struggle of your heart and turn from your lies, and you will find Jesus ready and willing to welcome you into his family.