



SENDTHEFIRE.CA

theme: Persecution x2 (**Acts 5:17-42**)

materials: Bibles, news story

welcome

Has it ever cost you anything to stand up for what you believe? Describe such a time.

Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.

worship

Where have you seen God this week? Where have you experienced divine community this week?

Where have you seen the gospel opposed this week? Pray for boldness for your fellow cell members to declare the gospel, and pray for those who oppose the gospel, that they would repent and be forgiven, or that their opposition would only strengthen and quicken the spread of the gospel.

If you are in Vancouver, join 614 on Thursday night at 6:30pm for Knee Drill prayer and worship time.

word

Read **Acts 5:17-42**

Why did the apostles get hauled into jail again? Why do they go willingly, and don't fight back?

Would you be willing to go to prison for the gospel?

Why did the angel liberate them? What did he tell them to do?

Why were they to preach their message in the Temple?

Sum up the mini-sermon that Peter gave in verses 30-32. What are the major points?

What does it mean that God "gives repentance" (v.31)?

Who does God give the Holy Spirit to?

Why was the Sanhedrin so enraged by Peter's words?

Why could the Sanhedrin not stop the message of Jesus from getting out around Jerusalem?

Why did Gamaliel counsel such a cautious approach? (v.34-39)

What did it cost the apostles to obey God and not the Sanhedrin?

Why were they rejoicing after being beaten?

What do we learn about the early Christian community from this story?

witness

The apostles, when released from the prison, were instructed by the angel to go and speak the words of Life in the Temple. What are the words of Life that you are speaking, and where are you speaking them?

Organise this week to go around in pairs or threes to people who have been to your cell before but have not been in some time. Visit them, bringing with you words of life and an invitation to come back to cell.

If you are in Vancouver, join in with one of 614's outreach ministries such as League of Mercy, Night Vision, or Street Combat.



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action points

Continue reading through the entire books of Luke and Acts with one other person. If the other person is a fellow believer, read them through in a public place, like a café (not yelling it out or anything, just reading it to one another). Make a regular time to come in and read together, and more likely than not someone will eventually ask you what you are reading and why.

If the other person is not a fellow-believer, perhaps choose a less public place to read, but again set regular times, daily if possible, to get together and read the Gospel. You don't have to read it all at once. Read two to three chapters at a time, and then meet another day to read some more.

When we preach the name of Jesus boldly, some will choose not to associate with us. That is ok. We cannot be afraid to preach the word boldly because it might lose us friends, respectability, or even donations. We have to trust that God's riches will be sufficient for our needs, and for the needs of his mission on earth. Pray with one another for the necessary funds for mission in your area, and remember to participate in this prayer with your own giving.

leader's guide

We see once again in this story how the healing actions of the apostles lead to their arrest and trial. The first time, after healing the paralysed man and preaching about Jesus at the Temple, Peter and John were arrested and tried, but eventually let go with a warning to discontinue speaking about Jesus in public. They immediately prayed with their community, were emboldened by the Holy Spirit, and continued on preaching and healing in the name of Christ. This time, writes Luke, after healing people in Jerusalem and from the surrounding towns, the apostles (not just Peter and John) were arrested and jailed by the high priest and Sadducees out of jealousy, presumably because they were getting so much favourable attention and were disobeying direct orders from the Sanhedrin.

At no time in this story did the apostles violently resist the authorities, as Peter had done when they came to get Jesus (Luke 22:50ff). They chose to disobey the Sanhedrin and to obey God, and to suffer the consequences of this wilful disobedience. In this case the consequences were arrest, imprisonment, trial, and a beating (possibly 39 lashes with a whip). Later many of the followers of Jesus would be tortured and killed by authorities they refused to obey. Imprisonment, beatings, torture, banishment, even death was considered preferable to disobeying God.

Their imprisonment at this time was short-lived, however, as an angel of the Lord released them in the night and instructed them to go and preach the word of this new Life, the salvation available through Jesus, at the Temple. This instruction they obeyed, adding fuel to the fire of the Sanhedrin's anger when they could not locate them the following morning for trial. Instead of being contained in the jail, they were back preaching in the Temple, doing exactly that thing they were forbidden to do and for which they had been arrested! That the angel told them to preach at the Temple is significant, in that the Temple was the place throughout Jewish history where God was expected to make himself known, and he was doing it now through the apostles.

As before, the apostles do not try to defend themselves at their trial. All they say is that they must obey God, and not men. Peter then takes the opportunity once again to give a sermon, the main points of which are: Jesus was killed by you, but the God of our Fathers raised him back up. God has now exalted him as Prince and Saviour, and he can give repentance and forgiveness. We have seen and testify to these things, and the proof is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is given to those who obey God.

In other words, whom the authorities had rejected and killed, God had raised up and exalted. And through Jesus, God was offering repentance and forgiveness, even to those who had rejected him, even to those who were



persecuting his people. God gives repentance in the sense of offering the opportunity and possibility of forgiveness; without this gift we could never be forgiven. And the Holy Spirit, the long-awaited presence of God in the midst of his people, would only be given to those who obeyed God, not man, as the apostles were doing.

This answer infuriated the Sanhedrin. It was an announcement that the apostles would not obeying them so long as they believed they were acting contrary to the will of God. All the power and authority was seemingly in the hands of the Sanhedrin, but in reality they could not prevent the message of Jesus from spreading. None of the threats thrown against the apostles would ever stop them from speaking about what they saw and experienced. The Sanhedrin did not have the authority to kill the apostles (only Rome could execute), but they certainly wanted to see them dead. They were prevented from taking rash action by Gamaliel, a Pharisee and Rabbi, who at one point was Saul of Tarsus' teacher (Saul shows up a little later in the story of Acts). Gamaliel urged caution, suggesting that given historical precedent, would-be Messiahs who were killed eventually lost their following. This makes good sense, of course. If, Gamaliel said, Jesus was just a man, then all the trouble would soon blow over, (or be finally dealt with by Rome). If Jesus was from God, then it would not be over any time soon, and the Sanhedrin would not want to be in opposition to God.

The Sanhedrin satisfied itself with letting them go, after a beating and another prohibition from speaking in the name of Jesus. The apostles rejoiced in the fact that they were found worthy to suffer indignity and pain for Jesus (thus following in their master's footsteps), and immediately disobey the prohibition by ceaselessly preaching and teaching about Jesus everyday in the Temple and from house to house. The persecution did not work, and usually does not work. Throughout the history of the Church persecution has often served to refine the Church rather than destroy it. This is not to say that we should not pray for and work to help those suffering persecution, just that we, like the first believers, can trust that even in the midst of the most horrific opposition to the gospel, those in power and authority still do not outrank the sovereign Lord of Creation.