

Thoughts on Acts Five

The men that we read about in Acts Chapter Five are very different from the same men that we read about in the gospels of Matthew and Mark. It is hard to comprehend such a change until we understand that the resurrection of Christ changed them. Before the resurrection, Peter spoke the opinions of the other close followers of Jesus when *"Jesus began to show to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go away to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised on the third day. And having taken Him near, Peter began to rebuke Him, saying, God be gracious to You, Lord; this shall never be to You"* (Matthew 16:21-22).

Later, while traveling through Galilee, Jesus *"taught His disciples, and said to them, The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And being killed, He will rise up the third day. But they did not know the Word, and feared to question Him"* (Mark 9:31-32). After several weeks of thinking about it, the apostles still did not change their opinion on what the Messiah would do. And still later, when Jesus told them that Lazarus was dead and He was going to Bethany near Jerusalem, the disciples tried to stop Him for fear of those wishing to kill him. But Thomas, who later doubted that Christ had risen (John 20:24-25), said, *"Let us go, even we, that we may die with Him"* (John 11:16). They were beginning to accept that Jesus might die, but the resurrection was not in their minds yet.

In Acts chapter five, we read of the apostles openly preaching in the Temple after their second imprisonment, probably visible from the Sanhedrin's council room. Their escape from the holding area in the Temple Guard's prison, combined with the previous command not to teach in Jesus' name, placed them in danger of the council's ability to seek their death. Now the apostles faced the council and told them that *"We must obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29). The result of this bold action caused the council to be affected, *"they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them"* (Acts 5:33).

As the Sadducee-dominated council became angrier, a highly respected Pharisee teacher named Gamaliel *"stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time"* (Acts 5:34). Gamaliel was a member of the Sanhedrin, a teacher of the law, and held in high honor among all the people. Seldom did a Pharisee stand up for a Christian, but Gamaliel wanted the council to see the possible results of their actions. He was the grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel who formed one of the schools of Jewish Law, which taught that the law must be understood from a spiritual viewpoint. Therefore, he did not get into the spiritual issues of the council but appealed to the historical evidence that God would not only defeat error and evil but would, at the same time, ensure that His will was done.

After reminding the council of some past false teachers who were able to convince many to follow them but perished, Gamaliel said, *"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"* (Acts 5:38-39). It is interesting to note the difference between this full assembly of the council to the unlawfully assembled, partial group of the council that condemned Jesus (John 18:19-24), (Luke 22:66-71).

It seems that the Sadducean portion of the council still wanted some punishment of the apostles because *"After calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of*

Jesus, and then released them" (Acts 5:40). The first time "When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened" (Acts 4:21). The second time, the Sanhedrin had their way with the physical punishment while the Pharisees seem to have honored their belief in the spiritual and stood behind Gamaliel's conclusion. We read of a similar split among the Jews when Paul made his address in Jerusalem. With the council together, called by the Roman commander, Paul began his defense against the charges made against him. "But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided... some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" (Acts 23:6-9).

The apostles were changed by the resurrection they witnessed. Do you believe their testimony? (John 17:20).