# Second Sunday of Easter April 28, 2019

***WE ARE WITNESSES***

**(ACTS 5:12, 17-32)**

12 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.

17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles. 22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 23 "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." 24 On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

25 Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." 26 At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

**Introduction**: We just celebrated the most important event in all of history – the miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ. We noticed last week that even Jesus’ closest followers were not expecting Him to rise from the dead. Their initial response to this message was one of incredulous unbelief. Yet because of His post-resurrection appearances, they remembered and finally understood the meaning of His predictions of His death/resurrection. The end of the story, right? Wrong. This was only the beginning, for the Holy Spirit was going to make them witnesses to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Our reading in Acts brings out this very point. Let’s see what we can learn from God’s Word and see how this impacts each of us today.

**I. Miracles and Meeting (5:12)**

5:12 – **“Miraculous signs and wonders”** are synonyms with various emphases. **“Miraculous signs”** (*sēmeion*) indicates the meaning to which the miracle points, and **“wonders”** (*teras*) draw attention to an amazed reaction to the miracle. Another popular synonym used in Acts (see 2:22) is “miracles” (*dunamis*) which focus on the dynamic power involved.

Numerous **“people”** were drawn to **“Solomon’s Colonnade,”** which was a covered porch that ran along the eastern side of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple area of Jerusalem.

**** These miracles were not performed merely for the sake of sensationalism. Rather, they served two major purposes: [1] to heal those who were suffering and [2] to draw others to Jesus. It is important for us believers to minister to people’s physical needs, yet we do not want to shortchange them and leave out the gospel! Our heart’s desire is to see people made whole, and that is only possible if Jesus is Lord of their lives. What a tremendous privilege and awesome responsibility we have as witnesses to the saving power of our precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! At times we have a tendency to underestimate the power of God, as this story illustrates:

During his pastoral ministry, Augustine came to know a woman in Carthage named Innocentia. A devout woman and highly regarded, she tragically discovered that she had breast cancer.

A physician told her the disease was incurable. She could opt for amputation and possibly prolong her life a little, or she could follow the advice of Hippocrates and do nothing. Either way, death would not be put off for long.

Augustine reports: Dismayed by this diagnosis, "She turned for help to God alone, in prayer." In a dream, Innocentia was told to wait at the baptistry for the first woman who came out after being baptized, and to ask this woman to make the sign of the cross over the cancerous breast.

Innocentia did as she was told, and she was completely cured. When she told her doctor what had happened, he responded with a contemptuous tone, "I thought you would reveal some great discovery to me!" Then, seeing her horrified look, he backpedaled, saying, "What great thing was it for Christ to heal a cancer? He raised a man who had been dead for four days." [From *More Perfect Illustrations*, p. 129]

**II. Menace against the Messengers (5:17-21a)**

5:17 – **“The high priest”** here is probably the elder Annas, though Caiaphas was the high priest of record with the Roman government (see 4:6).

**“All his associates”** probably includes the **“members”** of the Sanhedrin who belonged to **“the party of the Sadducees.”** Since **“the Sadducees”** did not believe in the afterlife, they were particularly offended by the apostles’ teaching about Christ’s resurrection (see 4:1).

**“Jealousy”** (*zēlos*) was undoubtedly based upon the phenomenal growth of the early church (4:4; 5:14) and the popularity of the apostles due to their dramatic healing ministry (5:12-16). However, the word *zēlos* may also have the meaning of “zeal” and here may indicate their religious fanaticism. There is probably a mixture of both of these nuances in this context.

5:20 – **“Life”** (*zoē*) here is basically synonymous with salvation (see 3:15; 4:12; 11:14-18).

**** Have you ever felt shy about sharing the good news about Jesus’ death and resurrection, because others might reject you and what you’re saying? You have good reason to feel this way, because there are people who will reject the gospel! Who ever said that the Christian life was easy? Whoever said that our faith would never be challenged? On the contrary, Jesus adamantly affirmed this: “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Yet we are never alone, for our Lord promises this: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). He provides the message and the means to follow Him – it is all His work. Our responsibility is to put our trust in Him and take the steps of faith in which He is leading us.

**III. Mayhem in the Morning (5:21b-26)**

5:21 – **“The Sanhedrin”** was the highest court of Jewish law (see 4:5, 15).

5:23 – **“The guards”** must have been made temporarily unconscious during the apostles’ miraculous escape as is implied in a similar escape (see 12:8-11, 18-19).

5:24 – **“The captain of the temple guard”** was mentioned earlier in 4:1.

5:26 – The Roman government did not allow the Jews to carry out their own executions, but mob violence could erupt and **“stone”** someone to death. The basic attitude of the Roman officials toward one of these “in house” (among Jews only) stonings was basically to ignore it.

**** Opposition may come our way, but Scriptures declare this message of reassurance: “He who calls you is faithful, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thessalonians 5:24). Our Heavenly Father will never give up on us, His dependent children. In fact, He can take even the most dismal circumstance and then work it together for good for us who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). This is certainly what He has done, is doing, and will continue to do for the apostles in the book of Acts. Because “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8), the Lord will do the same for us as we put our trust in Him.

**IV. Memory and Message (5:27-32)**

**A. Accusation: Failed Memories?! (5:27-28)**

5:28 – **“We gave you strict orders”** looks back to the command and threats in 4:18, 21.

**“Determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood”** has been affirmed by Peter in 2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10-11 (see also 5:30).

**B. Answer: Further Message (5:29-32)**

5:29 – **“We must obey God rather than men”** was earlier asserted by Peter and John in 4:19. This verse can be used to support civil disobedience, as it does here and other passages of Scripture like Daniel 3 with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and Daniel 6 when Daniel refused to stop praying. The basic principle is to submit to the state’s authority since it is instituted by God (see Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14), as long as it does not involve disobedience to God Himself. The angel clearly told them to continue preaching in 5:20.

5:30 – **“Hanging Him on a tree”** is probably an allusion to Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

5:31 – **“God exalted Him to His own right hand”** calls attention to Christ’s authority and special place of honor, as has been brought out in Acts 2:34 which is a quotation of Psalm 110:1.

**“Prince”** (*archēgos*) refers to Jesus as a “Leader” with authority (see also 3:15).

**** Even in this hostile setting, Peter and the other apostles are making the most of the situation by telling the good news to their persecutors! Those who are opposed to the gospel or even oppressing believers, so desperately need salvation in Christ alone! They are to be pitied, not feared.

**Personal Application**

You may be thinking: “Pastor Steve, it’s okay for the apostles and people like you to be sharing the gospel with others, but it’s simply too much for me. I am not cut out for this sort of thing.” There are a number of people who feel this way, just like Norm Geisler…

Some years ago, theologian Norman Geisler wrote a candid article in which he said: “I have a confession to make. I was a director for a Christian youth organization for three years, a pastor for nine years, a Bible college teacher for six years, and in all that time I did not witness for Jesus Christ. I scarcely ever shared my faith one-to-one with other people.”

Geisler offered several reasons for this: He didn’t think he had the gift of evangelism. He felt instead his gift was that of teaching the Word to those already Christians. He had read a book about evangelism and God’s sovereignty that had turned away his zeal for personal evangelism. He had known someone who had practiced impersonal, cold-turkey evangelism, and Geisler had determined that “lifestyle” evangelism was more desirable. But as a result, he lived a Christian life but seldom vocalized his witness to an unsaved person.

Eventually, he began to change through a song that said: “Lead me to some person today, O teach me, Lord, just what to say.” Those words became his sincere prayer.

One day, having prayed that prayer, he was approached by a girl from the college where he taught. She had spiritual needs in her life, and she became a believer through his witness. (She later became a missionary to South America.) He got in a conversation with a man who was an atheist, and after a few visits he became a follower of the Lord Jesus.

Now Geisler says: “The most rewarding experiences I’ve had in my Christian life have not come from teaching, pastoring, or ministering around the world. They have come from meeting with non-Christians and seeing one after another come to Christ. [From *Nelson’s*, pp. 779-780]

God can open even the most unlikely doors, as this story illustrates:

Pastor Wallace Hostetner of Rochester, Michigan, went for a haircut one day. His barber was a young Muslim woman. In the course of their conversation, he told her he was a pastor, he believed in Jesus, and that later that day he was going to perform a funeral.

She replied, “Once I was supposed to cut a dead man’s hair. They were going to pay me $150, but I wouldn’t do it.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t like to touch the dead. I’m afraid they’ll sit up.”

“I know one who did,” said the pastor.

“Ugh! You’re kidding.”

“No, I’m not,” he replied.

Then he told her about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When his haircut was done, she asked, “Are you going to keep coming here?”

“Yeah, I’ll come back.”

She said, “I’d like to know more.” [Taken from *Nelson’s Complete Book*, pp. 782, 777]

You may ask, “Can I do something like that?” Here is what an elevator operator at a hospital says, “I’m just a nobody telling everybody about Somebody who can save anybody.”

From one nobody to another about Somebody – who died and rose – for anybody and everybody,

Pastor Steve Waterman