



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 5:17–42

“Our Ultimate Allegiance”

TRANSCRIPT

Let's turn to Acts chapter 5 in verse 17 through verse 42 for our Scripture reading this morning. We are in the midst of a study of the history of the church in its earliest days. The Day of Pentecost has come with the coming of the Holy Spirit for this age. We have seen the apostles preaching and then experiencing persecution. Then we have seen them released and continue to preach. We have seen experiences in the local church that indicate that God is disciplining the saints when they disobey Him. And then we have an unusual statement of blessing on the part of the ministry of the word of God. And now we're going to read of the second persecution that the apostles and the early believers experienced.

Many people were coming to the knowledge of the Lord and miracles were taking place. In the 15th verse of the 5th chapter says: “Inasmuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow them.” Many sick people were being brought to the apostles and many who were disturbed by unclean spirits. And Luke says, they were healed, every one. Stress is laid in the text upon the universally effective work of the healing that took place in these early days.

Now, picking up the story at verse 17, the historian of the church writes:

Then the high priest rose up, and all that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) were filled with indignation and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” And when they had heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him; and called the council together and all the senate of the children of Israel; and sent to the prison to have them brought. And when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned and told, saying, “The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.” Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, “Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.” Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence—for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, “Did not we straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name? Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law. He had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, “Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were

scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him. He also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

May God bless this reading of His Word. We turn to the Lord now for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are so thankful to Thee that we are able to gather on an occasion such as this, in an auditorium such as this, and as a body of professing believers in Jesus Christ, with our friends and visitors, commit our needs to Thee. We are so thankful, Lord, for this privilege of prayer. It truly is a remarkable thing to us, that Thou hast opened the door into the presence of the eternal God and that we who live upon this earth may lift our voices to Thee and know that Thou dost hear them. We give Thee thanks and we give Thee praise and we bring our petitions before Thee. We give thanks for the ministry of the Lord Jesus, who has given repentance and remission of sins.

And we thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast removed our blindness of heart and hardness of heart and drawn us to Thee, in grace. We should never, Lord, be able to thank Thee enough for that which Thou hast done. But, we give Thee thanks. And we pray, Lord, that if there should be some in this auditorium whom have not yet the experience of the forgiveness of sins, may today Lord be that day when they turn to Thee.

We know that the needs of our lives are met in the knowledge of our great God. We are so troubled, Lord, in the society in which we live, to see so many people who do not have any understanding of the triune God in heaven; whose lives are lived totally apart from the knowledge of God and who are wandering around in the confusion and darkness of this lack of knowledge of our great God in heaven. We are troubled, Lord, by the things that are happening in our society; that are traceable to the lack of the knowledge of the true God. Violence. Sin. Departure from Thee. Rebellion. Even suicide by young people, who do not realize the consequences and who have no understanding of the knowledge of God. We are truly living in difficult and desperate days. O God, may the word of God go forth in power and may parents and may young people respond to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has come, who has been crucified for sinners and exalted to the right hand of the throne of God, and who longs to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. Lord, give faith, we pray, and save souls.

We pray for our country. We pray for the ministry of the Gospel by the church of Jesus Christ, wherever the word of God goes forth. Bless, Lord, richly that. We pray for our elders and deacons, and for the ministries of Believers Chapel and for the supply of all of its needs. We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast granted this ministry to this assembly of believers and, O God, sustain Thy work and glorify Thy name through it. We pray for those who are troubled, personally, who have physical needs. For those who are now listed on our calendar of concern, we especially Lord lay them out before Thee for the ministry that comes from heaven. May Thy hand be upon us in this service and in the service this evening, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We've noticed, as we have been studying the acts of the Holy Spirit, or the acts of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, that there has been a great deal of stress upon allegiance to God. And today, we see it highlighted in the 29th verse, in which the apostles reply, “We must obey God rather than men.” The subject for this morning is “Our Ultimate Allegiance.”

One of the striking things about the New Testament and about the book of Acts, with its history of the earliest church, is that for the most part the early believers seemed to be spiritual successes. The first generation in one sense did more for the evangelization of the accessible world than has any succeeding generation. It’s hard to look over human history and see any generation, even including the generation of the reformers in the 16th Century, that affected their world anymore than did these simple believers whose history is recorded in the book of the Acts. And the testimony of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem testifies at least to the success that they had; for they say to them, “Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.”

One of the characteristic things of the modern church is the discussion of how they may reach men. There are conferences on evangelism, conferences on revival. We discuss revivals, causes of revivals, hindrances to revival, ways and means of revival and evangelization—and the only thing lacking is revival. And, in spite of our many discussions, we still need to discuss. One of the characteristic things, also, of our modern world is that we’re afraid of extremism, until we’re guilty of the worst extremism of all, for Christians—and that’s the extremism of impotence. A good friend of mine, an old Bible teacher, used to say, “Some of us are so afraid that we shall get out on a limb, but we never get up the tree.”

The early church did not make that mistake. They were extremists in one sense, but their extremism was in obedience to the commission that had been given to them. They were men of courage because they were men of conviction. That’s evidence from the statement, “We must obey God rather than men.”

Incidentally, in the original text, that’s a preferable rendering to “We ought to obey God rather than men.” What they are talking about is what is logically the requirement of people who are the creatures of the Lord God and who recognize His sovereignty in the affairs of men. We must obey God rather than men. They didn’t ask questions like, is this the wise course to follow, obedience to the word of God? Should we not, perhaps, pull in our sails a little bit here? Hedge here?

They didn't say, is it safe to do this? Or, is it proper to do this? Their real attitude was: Does the word of God say that we ought to do this? And, regardless of the consequences, then we must do it. They did not, as Paul said, handle the word of God deceitfully.

There are, of course, times when we should preach certain doctrines at certain times. The apostle Paul speaks about the fact that he was unable to give meat to the Corinthians because of their spiritual condition. He had to give them milk. But, so far as the word of God is concerned, we are responsible for preaching all of the word of God. If we cut corners on the word of God and if we say that we shall not preach certain things because we shall experience persecution; or, men will misunderstand us; or we may suffer in other ways; we are really saying to the Holy Spirit in heaven, or to our Triune God in heaven, “You have unfolded truth for men which you should not have done.”

John Calvin used to talk about this; and he talked very much about it in connection with one of the doctrines that men do not like to hear. And, with reference to it, he said that we are, in effect, saying that God has let slip something hurtful for the church. Whatever has been revealed in the word of God is for our good and for our profit. And even those unpopular teachings of the word of God (and for Peter and the apostles, the ministry of our Lord was very unpopular), we are responsible to proclaim those words.

We cannot use compromise. We cannot be expedient in the teaching and preaching of the word of God. We must obey God rather than men.

Sometimes we think of this as a kind of ball and chain upon us. In other words, if we have to do that, we say it as if it's a bondage for us. We must obey God rather than men. They didn't say it in the spirit of bondage.

There's a story about Queen Victoria that once Gladstone brought a document before her, and he said to her, “You must sign this!” And she said, “Don't use that word ‘must’ to me.” And she was using it in the sense of a bondage and she wanted to let him know she did not have any bondage to Gladstone or to the government for that matter; that she was the sovereign.

Well, they say this, “We must obey God rather than men,” in the spirit of those who feel freedom. In other words, they say it with the lift of wings. It’s the music of a great imperative for them. We must obey God rather than men. Our allegiance is to Him. It’s not to men. It’s not to little puppets like you, who are ruling over Israel, you Sadducees, you Pharisees, you Scribes—and the same thing held true for the Romans, for the Romans stood behind them—you Romans and Caesar. You’re just men. We are responsible to God. This was a great, marvelous, uplifting doctrine to which they gave themselves.

Now, the apostles are in the midst of a magnificent movement. God is giving testimony to their message through spiritual gifts of healing. A multitude of people from the cities round about were bringing sick people in. Many who also were vexed with unclean spirits, Luke says. And they were healed, every one. In fact, there were so many people being healed and the apostles were so popular that people actually were placed upon beds and couches and placed out in the streets, in order that perhaps as Peter passed by the shadow of Peter might fall upon them, and they might be healed. That was when [indistinct] grew up.

Now, this is not in the Bible, but it was the society for the propagation of shadow healing. And that society was growing up in Jerusalem at this time because, after all, you can see if someone actually was healed by Peter’s shadow passing by, you can see how a great number of people would gather around and start something like a new movement—a kind of para-church organization. Now, I’m just pulling your leg, you understand. Some of you will go out and say, “Well, I haven’t read that in the book of Acts.” No, you haven’t. [Laughter] It was strange, and many strange things were happening. And, you can understand why the Pharisees and the Sadducees—particularly the Sadducees, who were the leaders in the council—they were very upset. They were very upset because of their doctrine.

In the first place, they didn’t believe in a resurrection. And, here is a shining example of the resurrection. And then, they didn’t believe in angels and they didn’t believe in spirits. So, you can see that the Sadducees were the liberal, religious school of the day. They were the ecclesiastical

eggheads—the leaders in advanced spiritual thinking—and, characteristic often of individuals like that, they were tolerant of everything it seems but truth.

I’ve lived in the academic world for a long time and one of the things characteristic of the academic world is its great emphasis upon academic freedom. Something that we must contend for. Academic freedom. But, one of the striking things about our academic world today is the fact that there is no real academic freedom in the academic world. Oh, there is freedom for the discussion of almost every kind of theory that one could think except evangelical Christianity. Generally speaking, we can discuss all forms of philosophy; we may discuss existentialism, or pragmatism, or skepticism, or rationalism, or process theology, linguistic analysis theology, *et cetera*. But, when evangelical Christianity in its pure form is discussed, well, it’s usually laughed out of court or some cheap tricks are used. And, always, a caricature of its claims. Almost always that takes place. That’s why the term “Puritanism” is looked upon as a bad term. Calvinism is looked upon as a bad term. Christianity in its purest form—we don’t have freedom. They didn’t have freedom.

And so, they were very upset. They did not investigate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with an open mind. And so, they were very upset at what was happening. The apostles were preaching with authority and power. The Holy Spirit was bringing people to the knowledge of the truth. These were largely Jewish people, too.

The Christian church, remember, began as a Jewish church. The promises that God had made to the fathers were being fulfilled to them. And so, finally, the Sadducees felt they had to do something about it and so they laid hands upon the apostles and they put them in the common prison. And they waited for the next day in order for them to be brought before the council but the “angel of the Lord”—we read in the 19th verse—“opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, ‘Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.’”

So, the cats at the general assembly, who were ready to eat the canaries, discovered that an angel had opened the cage and had sprung them.

You know, this illustrates something that is so often found in the word of God. These apostles are enabled to take French leave in Judea, by an angel. Sadducees didn't believe in angels. So, God sent an angel in order to release them. He could have released them in other ways; but He released them by an angel because the Sadducees had as their doctrine: “We don't believe in angels. We don't believe in resurrection. We don't believe in spirits. We don't believe in angels.”

In other words, the creed of the Sadducees falls before the Lord God like the fish-god, Dagon, did before the ark of the Lord in Old Testament times. In fact, the Lord always arranges Red Seas for pharaohs; he arranges gallows for Haman, who planned to put Jews upon the gallows. He arranges Davids for Goliaths and angels for Sadducees. And, it's almost as if God has a great sense of humor; at least, it's a great sense of humor for us, that He overthrows us in the very places where we think that we are wisest.

So, He loves to overthrow the wisdom of the wise with the foolishness of the cross. Because, you see, we are really foolish. It is we who are foolish. It is we who are unwise. It is we who are wrong. And it's the Lord's way of trying to show us that we are wrong.

Well, the angel came and he released the apostles. And he gave them a commission. One might ask, why didn't the angels preach? The angels came and said, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” Men, not angels, preach. Angels don't preach because angels do not know anything about the experience of divine redemption. How could they explain the burden of sin? How could they explain what the cross means? How could they explain the release that comes when an individual believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and the burden of the guilt and penalty and condemnation of sin rolls off of his back, down into the tomb of the cross?

It's amazing condescension, when you think about it, that men should preach. And what an honor it is for men to preach. And, down through the years, men have preached.

One of the signs, incidentally, of the divinity of the work of God is the fact that we as a church have survived our ministers. [Laughter] We are still in existence as a church in spite of those

weak and frail servants of the Lord God that we have had. But it is God’s will that men preach; and He will uphold His servants.

Now, they are to preach the ‘words of this life.’ I like that expression. It’s a very general expression; but one can see from the context what the angel had in mind. One might say, “You’ll notice that it is life and not doctrine.” That’s a characteristic thing for men to say. “It’s life not doctrine!” But, do not say that. That’s false.

Because, if we have nothing else, I would say to you, “What do you mean by ‘life?’” And you would say, “Oh, the life that comes from Christ.” Well, then you are beginning to define life by doctrine. There is no such thing as preaching life apart from doctrine. And, as one looks at this context, it’s quite certain that they were told not simply to preach some esoteric experience but they were told to preach an experience that is related to some clear facts that occurred in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He says, “And we are witnesses of these things and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” There are these things to which they are testifying, Peter will later say.

So, the ‘words of this life’ are words that have to do with the doctrine that leads to this life. All you have to do is to read this passage and see that.

What are the things? Well, first of all, at the conclusion of the chapter, in the last verse, it says, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” So, right at the beginning, the message that they had was a message about Jesus Christ: His deity, His manhood, the offices that He holds (prophet, priest, soon to come king), His death, His resurrection. These are the things that men are to preach.

The reason the church has so failed in the 20th century is because we have forgotten to preach these great things. And so, this illustrated so clearly about a decade ago, when a certain man was appointed as the unanimous moderator of the United Presbyterian Church’s New York Presbytery. This individual was elected unanimously by the elders to serve as the moderator of this

presbytery. Now, he was a man who had been caught up in the 60s and the things that took place in the 60s. But, when he became the moderator, he called himself a Christian humanist. And then, he went on to say this.

He said he “believed in social action and not preaching, or the rest of that nonsense we went through years ago.” Now, you can be sure that that man would not be a very effective representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. One who so flagrantly violates the teaching of the word of God.

We are to preach! Preaching is God’s way of making the message known.

Now, of course, it doesn’t all have to be a preaching like this: a preaching by or in a pulpit. One can preach to one other person. We’ve all been accused of that at one time or another, have we not? In fact, you can preach about a lot of things, too. Have you ever heard of a wife who accused her husband of preaching to her? Or a husband who accused his wife of preaching to him? Preaching’s not a public thing, necessarily, but of course, we are to preach publicly the things of our Lord. But, in our private conversation, we are to preach Him too. All of us, whether we happen to be people who stand behind a pulpit often or not.

What else did they preach? Well, it’s evident from the passages of this chapter alone that they preached His atonement. Reference is made by them to His blood in verse 28. We read of His death and His resurrection and His exaltation. So, they preached atonement; they preached repentance; they preached forgiveness of sins—forgiveness that was imparted to those who were the Lord’s people—and repentance and forgiveness that was implanted in their hearts. They preached the Holy Spirit as the present possession of believers. They preached the gift of faith, because they talk about those who obey Him. That’s all faith is—obedience—in fact, Paul calls faith the obedience of faith. And they preach life.

And, will you notice, also, that the angel told them to preach “all of the words of this life”? “Go, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” That which was offensive, they were to preach. That which was comforting, they were to preach. They were to preach all the words of this life. And so, they preached sin, which was not comforting and consoling,

because it was, first of all, convicting. And it was, actually, accusatory in this case, because Israel had put the Messiah to death.

And, they preached their sin in a context like that, and they did not shy away from it. They did not redefine sin. They did not talk about gaining self-esteem as a result of what was lost in the fall. But, they talked about the guilt and penalty and condemnation of sin. They preached the word of God without any kind of expedient treatment of it. No compromise. They preached what was offensive, as well. There was no such thing as a doctrine of reserve.

I wish all of you could spend a year in a theological seminary today. It would be so enlightening to people who sit in the pew. Because, if you sit in the pew, you tend to occasionally glamorize those who sit in a theological seminary. And, you often do not realize what goes on in a theological seminary. In some theological seminaries, part of the training is how you may carry on a ministry contrary to the beliefs of a large part of the congregation and do it in such a way that they never really know exactly what you are doing; so that you can accomplish another purpose. That seems strange, doesn't it? But that is true.

And, many of our Evangelical seminaries will compromise and hedge on points of doctrine and will tell their students not to preach this, or not to preach that. How can we expect to be effective when we do not preach *all* the counsel of God, as Paul has said? We are as preachers not to look forward to being popular. We do not have as our goal having a large congregation of people who hang upon every word that we say. Our responsibility is to be an ambassador of the Lord God and to preach His word, even if it should be very unpopular. Almost all faithful men have had experiences in which they have experienced what our Lord experienced. He experienced rejection. And, finally, He lost His physical life as a result of His preaching and ministering. And the story traditionally is that most of the apostles lost their lives, too.

There's nothing bad about that. We remember people who lost their lives for testimony to Christ. We remember a John Huss. We remember a Tyndale. We remember others who were burned

at the stake, because of testimony to the Lord. It's those who compromised that we don't remember. But, we remember the ones who do yield obedience to the Lord God.

Guilt seems to haunt the Sanhedrin. They say, “You're trying to bring this man's blood upon us.” Did you know that that still is true? Characteristic of Judaism has been—particularly in Orthodox Judaism—characteristic of it has been the avoidance of the pronunciation of the name of Jesus Christ. There has been a sense of the experience of guilt. Gentiles should feel it, too, because we are responsible for the death of our Lord just as Israel was. It's not simply an Israelite sin that Jesus Christ was crucified. You read the New Testament, it is very clear that the Gentiles had their part in the death of Christ, too.

Humanity is responsible for the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, Messiah of Israel and Messiah of the people of God.

Well, now, after the apostles are finally brought before the Sanhedrin again; and they have been accused of filling Jerusalem with their doctrine (verse 28). Then Peter replies to the leaders of his day—and, mind you, now, these are the important people in his society. It's just as if you and I, in the land of Russia, were called upon as believers to defend ourselves before the authorities in the Kremlin, what would we do? Would we cut corners? These men stand up, and their lives were at stake. And they say, first of all, to the Sadducees, “We must obey God rather than men.” And Peter exhibits courage. He speaks clearly. He speaks concisely—right to the point—“We must obey God rather than men.”

The council—you have, by your opposition to Israel's Messiah, you have forfeited your credentials. We are to obey God, not you! Why should there ever be any difference between the Sanhedrin, which stands as the leaders of Israel—the chosen nation—why should there be something different between them and the Lord God? Why should not they think His thoughts after Him? And thus, to disobey them is to disobey the Lord God.

But the apostles make a great difference between them, because they have apostatized from the truth. And so, “We are to obey God rather than men.”

Incidentally, this principle, “We ought to obey God rather than men,” pertains to all of our church life. This pertains to us in our individual life; it pertains to us as a church, as an assembly. We are to follow the teaching of the word of God.

Yesterday, I had a man who was from Houston, that called me during—well, a couple of weeks before, and said he was going to be in Dallas—he’d like to come by and talk to me. And so, he came by and he talked. We talked for five hours. The appointment was at 9 o’clock. He left at quarter past 2.

He came with a long list of questions. He’s a student of the word of God. He’s not a preacher. A student of the word of God. And we started at number one and we went down the list and we argued the truths of the word of God. And we had a lovely discussion. He’s a wonderful man, whom I’ve known for some time. And, then he said, “I have one last question for you.” He said, “I go to a church in Houston and from my reading of the word of God, it looks to me as if the church should be under the rule of elders.” And he said, “The pastor of the church that I know is a graduate of a seminary, not too far from us. We’ve discussed this and I have presented it to him, and he says to me, ‘But that will not work.’ What should I say to him?”

Well, I said, “First of all, obviously this young man has not studied church history, because it’s clear from church history that there have been literally thousands and thousands of churches in which the oversight of a local church is placed in the body of elders; rather than in the office of pastor. And, as far as I can tell, there is no such thing as the ‘office of pastor’ in the Bible. Paul didn’t write his letters to pastors. He wrote his letters to churches, with the elders and the deacons.”

And he said, “But the young man says it does not work.” Well, I said, “Well, I wouldn’t want to base everything on Believers Chapel but it’s worked for us for over twenty years. And if you will just study, you will find that it has worked for thousands down through the centuries.”

But think of the objection? It’s not a scriptural objection at all. It’s not, “Well, I see certain things in the word of God that are contrary to this.” It’s, “It doesn’t work.”

But, we ought to obey God, rather than men. Now, even if it could be shown—and I don’t think it can be because God’s principles work—but if it could be shown that up to a certain point, practicing the principles of God had not worked, we should still have to do them. We should still do them! This is our manual for life, and for ministry: the word of God.

We must obey God rather than men! We shall be judged by this! We’ll not be judged by whether it worked or not. We’ll not be judged by pragmatism. We’ll be judged by the Holy Scriptures.

And so, in the local church, in the things that we do in the local church, we are to ask ourselves, “What saith the word of God?” And we must follow the word of God.

Don’t misunderstand me—I don’t think that everything that has ever been done in Believers Chapel is in complete harmony with the Word of God. I don’t know of any flagrant abuses of the Word of God, but probably, if we had an apostle in our midst, he could point out a few things. And, we all would learn some things. I don’t say this in pride, but I do say this: We cannot compromise the Scriptures. We cannot cut corners with the Word of God. Ultimately, that is our standard. And, what our results are, that’s with the Lord God.

Now, Peter is very bold. He says, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But, then, he goes on to explain what he means. He says, “The God of our fathers has raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” Notice the divine initiative in the ministry of the word of God. It’s God the Father, who raised up the Messiah. “You slew him and hanged Him on a tree. You humiliated the Messiah. You not only put Him to death, but you hanged Him on a tree. And they knew and Peter knew that that which was hanged upon a tree was considered to be accursed. And so, you humiliated Him by putting Him to death, hanging His body on a tree, trying to publish to the whole world that this Jesus of Nazareth is under the curse of God.

That’s bold language, when your life is at stake! “You slew Him and you hanged Him on a tree. But God has exalted him to his right hand, to be a Prince,” that is, to be a king. He’s vindicated our Lord as the leader of Israel and the Messiah, as the blessed and only potentate.

And, while on the earth, you accuse Him of being just simply a blasphemer and a false messiah, in heaven they call Him, “The King of Glory.” His hands, the wheels of nature guide, with an unerring skill, and countless worlds extended wide, obey His sovereign will. He’s a Prince! And, also, He’s a Savior.

Incidentally, when he says, “He’s a Prince” he’s connecting Him with the Davidic covenant promises. The government shall be upon His shoulder. His name shall be called “Wonderful Counselor,” the “Mighty God,” the “Everlasting Father,” the “Prince of Peace.”

So, that man knew when Peter told him, we are saying that He is David’s son, and He sits upon the throne of David, and He rules as the Messiah.

But, he has also exalted Him to be a Savior, one who saves from sin.

And, of course, he can save even someone whose heart is as hard as a Sadducee’s, because His power is omnipotence, and “the cross can fetch waters of repentance out of stony hearts,” Mr. Spurgeon used to say.

And, in this audience today, if there are some of you who are very much opposed to the Gospel of Christ; let me assure you, first of all, that God has provided for repentance and forgiveness of sins in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; and He is able through the Holy Spirit to turn your unrepentance and impenitent and rebellious heart into penitence and submission to His will, so that you’ll come asking for repentance and forgiveness of sins. That authority rests in the power of our great God in heaven; and it is our earnest desire and prayer to God that that is what happens in our audiences, as the word of God is proclaimed. He is not only the Prince, but He is also a Savior.

Notice that He gives repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. He gives repentance to Israel! Think of it! Peter is offering to these men, who have crucified the Lord, repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Now, some people always find it difficult to harmonize the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Mr. Spurgeon said, “I don’t like to try to reconcile friends.” They are friends—

the sovereignty of god and the responsibility of men. Look, these are the men who have just said in the preceding chapter to the same kinds of people, to the Lord, but about them: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” In other words, Peter and the apostles say, everything that has happened has happened by the determination of God.

Then, we are told by some, why then should we preach, if everything happens according to the determination of God? Apostles believed that everything was done by the determination of God, but they knew that they were called upon to preach the word of God. And the things that happened are determined—were determined—by the Lord God. But the things that happened happened according to His determination—not only that they should happen, but that they should happen through the preaching of the word of God and through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, we preach the sovereignty of God and we preach the responsibility of men, and we know that they great doctrines are doctrines taught by the word of God. And, we are responsible to obey God rather than men.

He gives repentance to Israel. And, we call upon Israel and we call upon you, to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and receive the free gift of everlasting life.

You will notice, also, that he regards repentance as a gift. We preach that faith is a gift. We preach that repentance is a gift of God. To give repentance, to give faith, to give the forgiveness of sins—this is a Gospel of the grace of God. And, when we come to understand it, we know we have nothing within ourselves to boast in.

We boast in our Lord God. “Let Him the glory...” the Old Testament and the New Testament say. “Let Him glory in the Lord.” And, we glory in the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. Amazing Love, how can it be, that thou, my God, shouldst die for me. We sing that, out of the experience of redemption. Something no angel has ever had.

And, finally, in verse 32, he says, “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” The obedience of faith. You oppose Him in your opposition to Christ. Peter is making an appeal to these men, it would seem.

Well, at this point, we read about the admonition of Gamaliel. Gamaliel was Paul’s teacher. In this book, he will refer to Gamaliel. A very unusual man, he was the grandson of the great Gamaliel, famous in Jewish tradition. Gamaliel himself was one of the few who was called *rabbian*—our teacher. A man, obviously, a man of wisdom, a man of good sense, and so, he acts as an admonisher of the nation at this point. He reminds them that if this movement is of God, you cannot stand against it. And if it is of man, it will destroy—it will self-destruct. You see, it was a piece, you might think, of good advice. Well, it was good advice, but it wasn’t from the Lord God. It was a bit of theological opportunism, fence-straddling, middle of the road policy. “Leave it alone. Whether it’s of God or whether it’s of man.” He doesn’t take it upon himself to try and find out if it is of God. And, so, they are perfectly neutral—so they beat them—and then let them go.

Interesting way to take the middle course, isn’t it? You beat them and then you let them go. And the apostles go out and others, sharing the experience of the Lord. And they cease not to preach because they know that they are submissive to an authority that is greater than the Sanhedrin. And so, they rejoice that they are able to suffer shame for his name.

In fact, they put it in a very marvelous way. That they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. How can it be, that we Christians—I’m speaking of us in Believers Chapel—how can it possibly be that in the presence even of our friends, we do not have the courage, often, to give a testimony for Jesus Christ? How can it be? Here are apostles with their lives on the line, before the authorities of their world, standing boldly for our Lord, and rejoicing that they are able to enter prison for His sake? And we cannot tell our next-door neighbor that we are committed to Christ and ask them to consider Him too?

There’s a lot of confession that we ought to do. You know, this great principle—that we ought to obey God rather than men—pertains to us in many of the principles or many of the

experiences of life that we have. You’ll notice that they obeyed even if they went to prison. In other words, we are responsible to obey, no matter what the consequences. This has a great deal of application to some of the things that we have seen about us, in the life that is suggested for us by the leaders in religious thought. Situational ethics is something that men preach today, as if there were certain situations in which we should not be obedient to the word of God. No! We are responsible to obey the word of God and, even if it means prison, we obey the word of God.

And, if it’s necessary, we obey the obedience to the law, but at the same time, obedience to God. They went to prison. They came out; they started preaching immediately. They had the commission. They were responsible to someone higher than their law.

Our time is up. Let me just summarize very quickly. This tremendous principle—we must obey God rather than men—we must always remember, before us in every experience of life. We are not to consider God; hold theories about God; defend God. But, obey God.

Peter comments upon the fact that they are witnesses in their society. They are not talkers, simply. But, they are evidences. Talkers and their lives are evidences of the truth. And the church is powerful when it produces witnesses—not preachers. But this great gabby minority is the secret of the church’s growth and experience.

The power rests with God. They are witnesses. And so is also the Holy Ghost, the unseen power who cannot be obtained in university, cannot be obtained in seminaries. His control is seen in capitulation; His strength in submission; And His omnipotence in the obedience of individual men.

May God help us to take the apostles as an example for us as Christians! May God give us spiritual backbone, to be a witness, too. Resting upon the enablement of God the Holy Spirit.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Heavenly Father, we are grateful to Thee for these exhortations that come to us as well, for so often we’ve been cowards as representatives of our Lord. We’ve been like Demos; we’ve wanted to leave and go back. We’ve been like Peter, who in his weakness denied the Lord three

times. O, God, save us from such sin. Give us boldness and courage. If there should be some here, who have never believed in Christ, give them repentance and forgiveness of sins.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.