

## **“Worthy to Suffer Dishonor for the Name” (Acts 5:12-42)**

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*Acts 5:12–42 (ESV)*

<sup>12</sup> Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. <sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, <sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

<sup>17</sup> But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy <sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.<sup>1</sup>

I want you to imagine something. Imagine that right now, as we're gathered to worship, a team of federal agents storm into the building. They stop our worship service and say, "This is an illegal assembly. This church is not registered with the United States government. The reason this church is not an officially registered church is because you have failed to comply with government-approved doctrine. You all will be issued a warning for gathering at an illegal assembly." Then the federal agents interview each one of us, checking our identification, and writing down our information. They warn us not to gather again. If we do, we will face fines. What would you do? Would you come back next week?

Now, I know what you're thinking: "That can't happen here. We have the Constitution. We have the First Amendment, which promises us the free exercise of religion." That's true. But that doesn't mean something like that can't happen here. The Constitution is only as good as those who read it and interpret it and enforce it. And, in case you haven't noticed, there are a good number of people in this country who would think that some of our beliefs are intolerant and bigoted. There are people who think the biblical and historical claims of Christianity are beyond the pale. So, a scenario like this might not happen this year, but it's not impossible.

For the sake of the argument, let's say you returned next week. You say to yourself, "I must obey God, not the government, so I'm going to continue to gather with my brothers and sisters each Sunday." Then the federal agents return, this time writing up citations. How would

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

you respond then? How would you feel? What would you say and do? Would you rejoice? Would you say, “People hated Jesus, and they hate me, too, because Jesus is my Lord. Jesus said blessed are the persecuted, so I must be blessed!”? Or would you complain and whine, and say, “If only we could win the next election, this wouldn’t happen”?

In other words, if we faced real persecution today, would we respond like Jesus and the apostles or not?

Today, we’re going to consider suffering for the name of Jesus. We’ll consider when and how we’re supposed to obey God rather than the government. And we’ll also take another look at miracles. We’ll see all of this in Acts 5:12-42.

Now, before we look at those verses, let me say this: If you’re a Christian, this passage is very relevant. The more you actually live out your faith, the more conflict you’re going to have in the world. If you’re here today and you’re still checking out the claims of Christianity and wondering if all of this is true, you’re going to get an insider’s look at the faith.

So, with that being said, let’s look at the first five verses, verses 12-16.

<sup>12</sup> Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico. <sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, <sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Here’s what’s happening: Acts tells the story of what happened to Jesus’ followers after Jesus died, rose from the grave, and ascended into heaven. It tells the story of Jesus’ apostles—the ones who witnessed him after his resurrection—as well as other followers of Jesus. In chapters 3 and 4, two apostles, Peter and John, were at the temple and they performed a miracle and preached about Jesus. They were arrested by the Jewish authorities who were in charge of the temple and they were told not speak about Jesus again (Acts 4:1-22). Now we see that the apostles continued to meet at the temple, where they were performing miracles of healing. But “the rest” of the Christians were afraid, probably because of the threats that the priests and the Sadducees made. But the other Jewish people—the ones who were not yet Christians—respected the apostles, and many of them came to faith. These people brought the sick to Peter so that they

could be healed. People were coming from towns outside of Jerusalem into the city so that the sick could be healed.

I understand that the idea of miraculous healings is difficult for some people to believe. The whole idea that people could be healed simply by having Peter's shadow fall on them may seem even harder to believe. So let me make four points about miracles: One, I've said a number of times that "signs and wonders" are often discussed during the time of Moses, who led the Israelites out of Egypt, and during the time of Jesus and the apostles.<sup>2</sup> Luke, the author of Acts, wants to show us that the apostles are continuing the ministry of Jesus. Jesus healed many people, and now we see Peter doing the same. Later, we'll see Paul perform some miracles. And the way Peter heals people here is reminiscent of Jesus. Back in Luke's Gospel, he tells us of a time when a woman was healed simply by touching the fringe of Jesus' garment (Luke 8:44). Something similar is happening here.

Two, miracles are signs. They show something. They show that the one working the miracle is God's servant. The fact is that Jesus didn't need to touch people or be touched in order to heal people (see Luke 7:1-9). The same is true of Peter. But the fact that the healings come from Peter shows that God's favor rests on him. He is a servant of God, doing his work. The miracles show his message is true.

That leads me to me a third and related point: These miracles aren't arbitrary. God doesn't heal people just to show off his power. In another story, in the Gospel of John, Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding. It's not simply a parlor trick. Jesus takes jars of water that were used for "Jewish rites of purification" (John 2:6) and turns them into wine. And someone says that usually the good wine is served first, but this wine that Jesus made is better than what was served first. The point is that Jesus is superior to the old rites of Judaism. He brings blessings. And eternity is often depicted as a feast, with well-aged wine being served (Isa. 25:6). So the miracle shows a bit of who Jesus is and what he will do.

In the same way, the healing miracles are a picture of what Jesus does. All sickness, all diseases, all disabilities, and all deaths are the result of sin being in the world. I'm not saying sick people are sick because of their specific sins, though sometimes that is the case. I'm saying that because humans from the beginning have been separated from God, we get sick and die. So

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<sup>2</sup> The prophets Elijah and Elisha also perform many miracles that seem to anticipate the miracles that Jesus will perform.

the root cause of our sickness is sin, and Jesus came to save sinners. So these healings are pictures of what Jesus does for all of his people. We can't see forgiveness, but we can see a miracle that makes a blind person see, or a crippled person walk. All these miracles have meaning.

Here's the fourth thing I want to say about miracles before I move on. I know that it's hard for people to believe they're possible. They are even hard to define. Some people think they are simply an act of God. But according to the Bible, God is continually sustaining his creation (Job 5:10; Ps. 65:10; 147:8, 18; Matt. 5:45; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). So there's really no "laws of nature." They are simply ways of describing how God normally sustains his creation. But miracles are times when something different is happening. When a miracle occurs, God is acting in an unusual way, so that his power would be known. So, for example, we know the so-called laws of physics operate in certain ways almost all the time. But if someone were to be struck by the force of a car and not killed, we know God has exercised his power in a specific way for the purpose of demonstrating who he is. Many types of cancer are thought to be incurable, and people normally die from them. It's not as though God doesn't have control over the situation. But sometimes people are cured in ways that we simply can't explain, except to say that God did something unusual.

The fact is that I have never seen a miracle. But I know that many people have reported experiencing miracles. I think it's often supposed that only uneducated people believe in miracles. It's often assumed that only people who aren't aware of scientific explanations believe in miracles. But the fact is that all kinds of people over thousands of years have reported miracles. Some of these people are highly educated people.<sup>3</sup> The fact is that it doesn't take a great deal of scientific knowledge to understand when a miracle occurs. For example, people have always known that in virtually every case, when someone dies, they stay dead. One doesn't need to know much about biology to know that a body that's been dead for over a day simply doesn't come back to life. But when the disciples saw Jesus alive, after being in the grave for approximately thirty-six hours, they knew it was a miracle. They knew dead bodies stay dead. That's why they were so amazed that Jesus was alive again.

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<sup>3</sup> Stories of miracles are catalogued in Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Eric Metaxas, *Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life* (New York: Dutton, 2014).

So, though I have never seen a miracle, I have many reasons to believe that the Bible is true and that miracles happen. Now let's see what happens next in the story. Not everyone was excited about these miracles. Let's look at verses 17-18:

<sup>17</sup> But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy <sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

The high priest and the Sadducees—the leaders of the temple—were filled with jealousy. They saw the respect that the apostles were being given. They heard about the miracles they were performing. They sensed they were losing control. One of the things that is happening here in these early chapters of Acts is a conflict between the church and the powers that be at the temple. God is now dwelling in his people, the church. The temple has become obsolete. And this conflict escalates until someone dies, as we'll see in a few weeks. But now, the leaders of the temple have the apostles arrested.

The next couple of verses show that the apostles couldn't be stopped. I'll read verses 19, 20, and the first half of verse 21.

<sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup> "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." <sup>21</sup> And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

We see another miracle. An angel comes, opens the prison doors, and tells the apostles to go back to the temple so they can keep preaching about Jesus. The "words of this Life" must be about Jesus and about his message. In John's Gospel, Peter said to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

This may seem like another far-fetched miracle, but there's a story of a Chinese Christian man named Brother Yun. He was imprisoned several times for preaching about Jesus. At one point, he was in a maximum security prison. He said that the Holy Spirit told him to walk out of the prison. Though he could have been shot and killed for attempting to escape, he obeyed the voice and walked through several prison doors that were somehow open. He walked in front of many prison guards as if he were invisible. Though the story seems hard to believe, a number of

prison guards lost their jobs for letting him escape. Even the Chinese government admitted that Yun “received no human help in his escape.”<sup>4</sup> God is still in the miracle business.

Why would God free the apostles from a prison? Well, for one thing, he wanted to make sure the gospel message wasn’t hindered. I suppose another reason why God did this was because it’s a perfect image of the gospel. The gospel sets us free. We are freed from our bondage to sin. We are free from our bondage to guilt and shame and a life of emptiness. When Jesus began his ministry, he read a portion of the book of Isaiah and said it was about himself. He said,

- <sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus didn’t actually set people free from a literal prison during his time on earth. But he did set people free from captivity to sin. This message is so important that it couldn’t be stopped by a prison in Jerusalem or a prison in China, or by any government.

In time the temple authorities figured out that the apostles had escaped. We see that in verses 21-26. I’ll start reading halfway through verse 21.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. <sup>22</sup> But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, <sup>23</sup> “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” <sup>24</sup> Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. <sup>25</sup> And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” <sup>26</sup> Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

I wonder what exactly these religious leaders thought when they found out the apostles had escaped. The doors had been locked and the guards were in their places, but somehow these men

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<sup>4</sup> I first read about Yun in Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 159. More information can be found on the Wikipedia on Yun: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brother\\_Yun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brother_Yun) (accessed March 19, 2016).

were gone. They must have been even more amazed to find that the men were back at the temple. Regardless of what they thought, they apprehended the apostles. But they didn't use force. Why? Because they were afraid of all the people at the temple. The people viewed the apostles favorably, and these leaders didn't want the people to throw stones at them.

Let's look at verses 27-32 to see what happened next.

<sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

The council—the Sanhedrin—consisted of the high priest and seventy other members. They were "the senate and supreme court of the Jewish nation."<sup>5</sup> The majority of them were Sadducees, who had more political power but didn't believe in angels and the afterlife, including the resurrection. Pharisees, who put great emphasis on the Old Testament law, were in the minority. This council had the apostles before them, and they reminded the apostles that they had told them not to teach about "this name." They can't even bring themselves to utter Jesus' name. They said, "you intend to bring this man's blood upon us" because Peter had previously said that they were responsible for Jesus' death (Acts 2:23; 3:13-15; 4:10). But Peter tells them he can't stop speaking of Jesus. He even reminds them again that they killed him by hanging him on a "tree." He's making a reference to a passage in Deuteronomy 21:22-23, where it says

<sup>22</sup> "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup> his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.

The reason a man would be put on a tree is so that others could make an example of him. And the Roman Empire crucified people on "trees" of wood, on crosses, for the same reason—to show what happens to the worst criminals. But Jesus wasn't a criminal. He never did anything

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<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 91n12.

wrong. That's what's so amazing about Jesus: he takes the curse that we deserve for our sin and he dies in our place. That's why Paul uses that passage in one of his letters to show what Jesus did for his people (see Gal. 3:13).

Peter continues to preach the good news of Jesus. He says that Jesus died, bearing the curse, and he rose from the grave. He did this so people could repent of their sins—they could turn from their old ways. And then they would experience forgiveness. That offer stood for the Sanhedrin, and it still stands for you and me and all that we know. All who put their trust in Jesus receive forgiveness of sins and they receive the Holy Spirit, the third Person of God, who is a guarantee that God dwells in us. The Holy Spirit empowers all our Christian life.

Peter makes it clear that the reason he can't stop preaching about Jesus is that he must obey God rather than human beings. Now, if you know the Bible well, you know that there are other passages that tell us to be subject to the government (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). And we normally should do that. But if the laws of the land conflict with God's laws, we must obey God. And God has called us to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). We are supposed to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). We are supposed to be royal priests who proclaim the excellencies of God (1 Pet. 2:9). No government can stop us from doing these things. If they tell us to stop, we must keep obeying God.

We have two motivations for obeying God in this matter: For one thing, we have the power of God inside of us. If you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. He will prompt you to talk about Jesus. We also know the truth. We are witnesses of what God has done because we know what the Bible says. We know that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the grave almost two thousand years ago. We know the significance of this event. We should be able to see the way that God has worked in our lives. So we must proclaim what we know to be true, even when others tell us to be quiet. And when God's commands come into conflict with the laws of the land, there is simply no choice for Christians. We must obey God rather than men.

When the council heard this, they wanted to kill the apostles. They were enraged. Perhaps they understood the implications of what Peter had said. Peter said the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—had raised Jesus. This same God gave the Holy Spirit. The implication is that the council, who rejected Jesus, are disobeying God. They thought they were God's people because they were Jews. But Peter is telling them that they need to repent and put



their faith in Jesus in order to truly be God's people. Let's read what happened next in verses 33-39.

<sup>33</sup> When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. <sup>34</sup> But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. <sup>35</sup> And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. <sup>36</sup> For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. <sup>37</sup> After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. <sup>38</sup> So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

Though many were enraged, one cooler head prevailed. Gamaliel, a famous teacher of the law, one who taught the apostle Paul (Acts 22:3), suggested a different approach. First, he mentions two men who began movements that were soon ended. He says that a man named Theudas claimed "to be somebody" and had a following of about four hundred men. We don't know exactly who this man was. Josephus, the first-century historian, writes about a Theudas who was a magician and who claimed to be a prophet. This Theudas misled people to follow him but he was killed.<sup>6</sup> But this Theudas came about ten or more years after Gamaliel made this speech, so this must have been another man with the same name.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps he led an insurrection after the time that Herod the Great died. Judas the Galilean is someone that Josephus also mentions. He led a revolt in the year A.D. 6, because he thought being taxed by the Roman Empire was no better than slavery.<sup>8</sup> But he, too, was stopped.

Gamaliel's point is that if the apostles were like Theudas and Judas—men who acted on their own initiative—their movement wouldn't amount to anything and their plans would be stopped. But, if this was something different, if the apostles were "of God," then regardless of what they did, they couldn't stop them. Not even killing the apostles would stop the movement. Worse, if the apostles were doing God's work, the council "might even be found opposing God!"

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<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.97-98.

<sup>7</sup> See Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 235-39, for reasons why Josephus should not be trusted over against Luke as an historian.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.4-10.

Gamaliel made a remarkably prudent step. By giving the apostles a warning and a beating, they could avoid opposing God (in case they were wrong) and causing a riot (in case they were right).

So the apostles were released, but not after they were punished. Let's finish the chapter, beginning with the very end of verse 39.

So they took his advice,<sup>40</sup> and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.<sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.<sup>42</sup> And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

The apostles were released, but not until after they were beaten. They were probably flogged, or whipped. Deuteronomy 25:3 says that a man should receive forty "stripes," or lashes, and not more. So Jews had set a limit of thirty-nine lashes, to make sure they didn't go past forty.<sup>9</sup> In 2 Corinthians 11:24, Paul says, "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one." So the apostles probably received a fairly intense beating. Then they were told again not speak of Jesus.

And what did they do? They rejoiced! Why? Because they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. And they kept on preaching and teaching that Jesus is the Messiah, or Christ. He is the promised King of Judaism. He is the true King of the world.

Why would someone keep on teaching about Jesus in the face of threats? Only because that person believed that the message was true and vitally important. The apostles knew that Jesus died and rose from the dead. They knew that he was the Son of God, God in the flesh. They knew his death paid for their sins and reconciled them to God. They knew he is the only way to eternal life.

And why would they rejoice? They were counted worthy. Counted worthy by whom? They were counted worthy by God. Jesus once said,

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:10-12).

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<sup>9</sup> This is prescribed in the Mishnah, a collection of Jewish oral traditions (*m. Mak.* 3:10-14).

Jesus also said, “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Luke 21:17; cf. John 15:18-25). This episode showed that Jesus’ words were true. The council regarded the apostles as they did Jesus. So the apostles knew they were becoming more like Jesus. They were participating in his suffering (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13).

What does this mean for us?

First, let’s think about the miracles. Though God has not promised us that we will see miracles, these stories give us hope. We do know that God will heal all of his people in the end. There are some people here today who are struggling physically. God may grant you some healing in this life. And we can hope and pray that he does. But God’s timeline is not like ours. He may not provide that healing now. But he will in the next life. We know that in eternity, all God’s people will live in bodies that can never decay and die. These healings are a foretaste of what will happen when Jesus returns to make all things new.

Second, are we willing to proclaim the good news about Jesus even when the government tells us not to? Are we willing to share the good news even if it means we’re ridiculed or threatened? If we were in the apostles’ shoes, would we compromise and remain quiet? Jesus once said,

<sup>8</sup> “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, <sup>9</sup> but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8–9; cf. 2 Tim. 2:11-13).

Will we acknowledge Jesus before others?

This story reminds me of the story of Martin Luther (1483-1546). Luther was a German monk who lived at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was very corrupt. The church was selling indulgences, which supposedly reduced the punishment that people would receive for sin. Luther taught the Bible at a university in Wittenberg, and as he studied the Scriptures, he saw that we can only be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus, and this is a gift from God. No amount of money given to the church can satisfy God’s righteous demands. No amount of good works can do that. Only Jesus’ perfect life and his atoning death can satisfy God’s righteousness.

Luther then wrote his famous *95 Theses* in 1517, showing how the Catholic Church’s sale of indulgences was wrong. He very quickly gained notoriety for his writings. Of course, this put him in trouble with the Church, and he was excommunicated in 1521. He was then ordered to appear at an assembly of the Holy Roman Empire (this is known as the Diet of Worms), also in

1521. He stood before the Emperor, Charles V, and he was asked to recant his writings. Luther said he couldn't go against Scripture and his conscience. He closed his speech by saying, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen." The Emperor wanted Luther to be arrested and punished as a heretic. Surely, he would have been killed. But Luther was given safe passage by Frederick the Wise, the prince of Saxony. He hid in the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach, where he translated the Bible into German. Luther's faithfulness and boldness preserved the true gospel. He risked his life because he knew he had to obey God and not man. Would we do the same?

Finally, remember that the apostles were persecuted because they were evangelizing. They were preaching about Jesus. Sometimes, Christians in America today talk about being persecuted when they are criticized or even mocked for being judgmental, for acting like jerks, and for even being foolish. But that's not persecution. Persecution isn't suffering for doing something wrong. Persecution isn't simply suffering because we live in a fallen world. We all suffer physical and emotional pain. But persecution is suffering specifically because we're Christians, and, in this case, suffering for sharing the gospel. Here's the question we need to consider: If evangelizing were illegal, would there be enough evidence against us to prove we're guilty? Are we actually sharing the gospel with anyone? And when I say the gospel, I don't mean saying, "God loves you," or, "I'll pray for you." The gospel is the message that God has made us for himself, we have turned away from him and are deserving of condemnation, but God sent his Son to live the perfectly righteous life we don't and can't live, and to die in our place so that we're not condemned. All who repent of their sins and put their trust in Jesus will be reconciled to God. Those who reject Jesus stand condemned. That is the message, in a nutshell. Are we telling people that? If someone told us not to share that message or else we would be punished, would we compromise? Would we remain silent? Or would we say, "Here I stand, I can do no other"? Would we say, "I must obey God rather than men"?

Let us continue to follow Jesus. Let us tell others about him. And if we should suffer, let us rejoice, knowing that God has considered us worthy to suffer for the name of his Son.