

Acts 5:12-42

Truth Over Comfort

Learning Objective(s)

- To explore the disciples' relationship with the religious leaders and how it applies to our lives
- To discuss how to speak the truth, even in face of conflict

Pray for your time together as a group.

? Think of a time where someone asked you about something, and you knew they wouldn't like your answer. What did you do?

Read Out Loud: Acts 5:12-32 (NIV)

¹² The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

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 all about 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 at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

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 The apostles were brought in and made to 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 human beings! ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

? In verses 13 and 14, we can see the people’s response to the teachings of the apostles and the apostles themselves. Despite their high regard of the apostles, why would people be hesitant to join them? Have you ever experienced this kind of hesitation?

Possible Answers: Those who heard the apostles were afraid to be overt in their belief because of the possible consequences of joining the believers openly. It can be difficult to be a Christian; there are social and physical and sometimes even larger consequences that can affect believers’ lives in a major way. This is as true now as it was then, though in American society the physical dangers of belief are less. Following God honestly takes courage, dedication, and recognition that you may lose things; but that loss is worth it to have Christ!

? When the apostles were arrested, an angel of the Lord released them (vs. 18-19). ? Why do you think God freed them this way, instead of a different route, such as working in the religious leaders’ hearts to let them go?

Possible Answers: The disciples were freed by an angel who told them to go stand in the temple courts and preach the “message of this new life”, the Gospel. It’s possible that God freed them this way for several reasons: to show His power and approval of their actions; to make their arrest/confinement obvious to the public so it wasn’t hidden; to give them the chance to speak boldly and directly to the religious leaders from a place of choice, rather than coercion; and to prepare them for the continuous, ongoing opposition they would face as followers of Christ.

The Sanhedrin was the religious authority of the Jews of the day. They were supposed to be the highest and most honored, wisest and closest to God. To have their authority questioned not only undermined their political and social clout, but threatened their legitimacy as spiritual leaders. Their stubborn refusal to listen and their use of force to silence those they disagreed with would reflect very badly on the Sanhedrin if it were widely known.

? Why is it significant that the apostles went back to the Sanhedrin with the guards of their own free will (vs. 26)?

Possible Answers: It’s significant because they were choosing to trust God by speaking the truth in front of the Sanhedrin instead of trusting the safety provided by the crowd, which likely would have been on their side and protected them if they had asked for that.

? Peter angers the Sanhedrin by stating, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” Why are they angry, and why is the root of their anger important?

Possible Answers: They are furious because Peter and the other apostles will not obey them, but instead prioritized another authority. The Sanhedrin is most concerned with its own reputation and power, and their anger stems from the disciples telling the truth about what happened to Jesus and fear of the people rising up against them. The disciples aren't slandering the leaders, but instead insistently telling the truth that makes them look bad, jeopardizing their position of authority.

Read Out Loud: Acts 5:33-42 (NIV)

³³ When they heard this, [the Sanhedrin] were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.



What is Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin in verses 35-39? Why is this significant?

Possible Answers: Gamaliel said that if the apostles' purpose or activity was just human, they would fail, but that if it was from God, no one could stop them because no one can overcome God. It's significant because Gamaliel was the first and only one to acknowledge that the apostles might be speaking truth from God, and that they cannot oppose God and hope to win. His advice also saved the apostles' lives; God used him to both preserve them and to speak truth in a privileged way to the religious leaders of the day. God can even use unbelievers to speak His truth!



What can we take from the consequences the apostles faced and their reaction to their punishment?

Possible Answers: Suffering is not inconsistent with God's will for the lives of His followers. The apostles rejoiced at their flogging, glad they could experience disgrace for the Name of Jesus. Their response shows us it's possible to continue speaking the truth and rejoicing in any circumstance.



What consequences do we as Christians face for telling others about the Gospel?

Possible Answers: We can face social rejection, being thought of as bigoted or idiotic, being ridiculed, dismissal of our value and objectivity when it comes to making judgment calls, and even losing out on job opportunities or achieving our social and career goals.

? What makes it hard to speak the truth of the Gospel?

Possible Answers: It's hard to face losing something you value, or missing out on an opportunity or possibility that you've been struggling for. It's much easier to stay silent and let people think you agree or have no opinion. It can be very hard to speak the truth when you know it will hurt someone's feelings or make them respond harshly to you.

? How can we gain encouragement from this passage to speak truth rather than seeking comfort when we talk to others about our beliefs?

Possible Answers: The apostles valued the truth and the blessing and the relationship Christ brings over all other things. Their joy in sharing that hope and truth with people despite persecution shows us that even if we have to endure very hard things, good and joy and right can come of it.

For Discussion and Accountability

? What does obeying God, rather than men, look like in your life?

? What makes you back down from sharing Gospel truth? How can you stand up and speak the truth this week?