

Acts Part 15 – Counted Worthy to Suffer

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Tuesday, December 9, 2015

Acts 5:33-42†

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.
34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

36 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.

37 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.

38 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:

39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

40 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.

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Last week we looked at verses 26-33 and the questioning of the Apostles concerning their preaching, by the council and what results of it were. We saw, just as we read in our opening text tonight that when Peter stood up and preached in defense of their preaching that the people in the council were “cut to the heart” and wanted to kill them.

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

As we discussed last Wednesday there are different reactions to conviction and the Sanhedrin council chose the worst reaction, violence. I mean, they want to kill the Apostles and put their heads together to figure out how to do it.

34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

We are first introduced to Gamaliel here. He is mentioned one other time in the Bible and we will look at that when we get to Acts 22 and Paul is giving his defense before the Jews and the Roman officials after he was pulled out of the Temple by some angry Jews and accused of polluting the Temple. So Paul gives a rundown of who he is: **Acts 22:3: I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.**

Gamaliel was one of the most respected Jewish teachers in all of Palestine. It is said that when Gamaliel died that all of the honor of the law died with him.

We have some background on Gamaliel given to us by Dr. John Lightfoot who was an English preacher and Hebrew historian in the 1600's. He said the following about Gamaliel: **Gamaliel was the teacher of Paul, the son of the “Simeon” who took the Saviour in his arms Luke 2, and the grandson of the famous “Hillel,” and was known among the Jews by the title of “Rabban Gamaliel the elder.”**

Gamaliel sat on the Sanhedrin court and he was a Pharisee. The majority of the court was made up of Sadducees and the rest Pharisees. The problem was the Sadducees were the more well-off, conceited group and they did not have any respect among the Jewish people but the Pharisees were thought highly of the people, they were more of the blue collar religious group. It said that Gamaliel had a reputation among all the people, which means he was very well thought of.

Christian tradition claims that Gamaliel became a Christian at some point and was baptized by Peter and John and kept it a secret so he could remain on the Sanhedrin court to help sway opinions in matters of Christianity. Of course the Bible does not mention this so we cannot say it is a fact because it is not recorded in Christian or Jewish history.

Gamaliel told the council to “**put the Apostles forth a little space.**” That means put them in another room away from us so we can discuss the matter.

35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

So Gamaliel warns the council that they need to think a little more about all of this before making some rash hasty decision. There may be a lot at stake here.

36 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.

Then he reminds them of two different revolts that had happened in the past that came and went. A man named Theudas who had gained a pretty large following of people but things didn't work out for him as he was slain and his followers were scattered.

This is probably the same Theudas that Josephus, the Jewish Historian, wrote about in his Antiquity of the Jews: It came to pass, while Cuspius Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain charlatan, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the Jordan river; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it. Many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them. After falling upon them unexpectedly, they slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem.†

37 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.

Then a man named Judas of Galilee the same thing had happened in his case. Josephus also writes about this man and said that he was from Gamala. According to the Columbia Encyclopedia, Judas of Galilee was a leader of the Zealots, a radical revolutionary Jewish sect. He raised an insurrection against the taxation census of Cyrenius (A.D. 6) on the grounds that no one but God was Israel's master, and he was killed.[§]

38 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:

Gamaliel tells them based upon past similar instances if God isn't in it then it will not last. So they need to leave them alone and time will tell if it is of God or not.

39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

Then he warns them if they try to overthrow them and they are of God then they are fighting against God.

Gamaliel seems to have much more wisdom than the rest of the council. Instead of letting his anger override his brain, he take deep thought about the problem. You will find in life that men who allow anger to dictate their response to problems are weak men.

Even our Lord councils us to take reason over rebellion:

Isaiah 1:17-20: Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. 18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 19 If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: 20 But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

One thing is for sure, you do not want to fight against God. Over in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus said this: **Matthew 12:30:** He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

40 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.

Gamaliel only half way got through to these angry men. They are persuaded not to kill them but they couldn't just let them walk out scot free so they beat them. It was common that the Jews would beat prisoners for minor offences by giving them 39 stripes. Paul talked about these beatings by the Jews when he was giving a list of things that had happened to him. He says this in **2 Corinthians 11:24** Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. It was 40 save one making it 39 just in case they went over the prescribed amount of lashes.

Most likely the Jews beat the Apostles to show them that they were in authority. Otherwise they may have looked weak in front of the people. And they once again told the Apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus.

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

A lot of good it did for the council to beat them and threaten them. This just made them all the more excited about preaching.

This is just one of many times Peter and John would suffer for Christ's sake. Peter would later write about suffering in his epistle and remind us that Christ also suffered: **1 Peter 3:14-18** But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: 16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. 17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. 18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

And in the next chapter Peter writes this: **1 Peter 4:12-14** Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

Let me say this; if you are living a Christian life the way a Christian should live then you will suffer for it. You will be persecuted in some way. That's just the fact of a Christian. Paul writes about it in Romans 8:16-18:

Romans 8:16-18: The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

And once again, the Apostles could care less what the council told them, they intended to please God and spread the Gospel as long as there was breath in their bodies. They went right back into the Temple and started preaching and teaching about Jesus.

I wonder how many Christians today would be as strong as these Apostles. Nowadays we give up at the least little setback.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version

‡ Jewish Antiquities 20.97-98

§ The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia™ Copyright © 2013, Columbia University Press. Licensed from Columbia University Press