

May 16, 2021  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Acts  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## DISPLAYS OF THE BUILDER'S AUTHORITY

### Acts 5:12-22

Recently our mission construction team took a trip to Ohio to do some work at Peniel Bible Camp. Their goal was to put a couple of additions on the dining hall and activity center. From the outset it seemed that all was going well. However, the road began to get a bit bumpy as it became clear that the architect had not produced drawings that called for some necessary features. So Mark and the crew, being experienced and knowing what was really necessary, added the extra outlets, HVAC, and such to make the finished product useful.

That part is fine. However, there are these people called inspectors who are required to put their stamp of approval on a project. One of their simple rules is, "If it isn't on the architect's drawing, it doesn't get approved." That is fair enough and contractors know they have to operate under those guidelines.

There have always been conflicts similar to that on earth as Jesus Christ is building His Church according to His promise. He is the architect. His plans are always perfect. We are the contractors. Our Architect is the Master Builder and we simply work according to His plans and under His authority. A problem we keep running into is that this world has plenty of religious "Inspectors" who are actually employed by our Master's enemy. They are opposed to Christ building His Church and will make any number of rules and take almost any kind of action to keep it from happening.

That is the picture of the religious rulers described in our text. Jesus promised that He would build His Church (Matthew 16:18) and that He will use people like Peter, the other apostles, and us to accomplish His purpose. That He is determined to build His Church

and determined to use mere people to do it implies that He is the absolute authority in the process.

The religious rulers in Israel were not included in the building process. They really did not have a say, but thought that they, of all people, certainly were in charge of these matters. When it became obvious that Christ was building His Church without them, yea in spite of them, they became jealous. They feared they were losing favor with the people, which is ironic because it is debatable whether they had the people's favor.

At the very least this was a battle for authority. Even if the people were not favorable toward the religious rulers, they still held the masses under the thumb of their authority, or at least they liked to think that was the case. We should delight to read these stories about Jesus unraveling the religious leaders' blanket of authority. Jesus would do whatever He knew best in establishing His Church. His work often made the self-appointed authorities squirm. It makes us think of Jesus' statement to Saul when He knocked him down on his way to Damascus. Jesus said to him, "*It is hard for you to kick against the goads*" (Acts 26:14).

The story of our text is so encouraging to us followers of Jesus. We are reminded that He is in charge of the building of His Church. It is His project. We follow His plans. And when there is a conflict between the Master Builder and the enemy, Jesus is always right and proves it by His authority.

### Demonstrations of Christ's Power (vv.12-16).

Christ the Master Church builder did His work with many signs and wonders. It was such an uncommon time that miracles became a regular event. *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 (v.12).*

Notice from this statement that the Church was all together. On one hand, this has reference to the unusual unity they shared. *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts (Acts 2:46).* This was a picture of thousands of people divided up meeting

in hundreds of homes. It is a picture of unusual unity in very unusual circumstances.

However, on the other hand, the statement of our text refers more likely to the people actually meeting together at the temple to praise and worship God. But even then all 5,000 plus (the number was probably over 10,000) could not have gathered at the same time at the location stated.

We read that they were all together in Solomon's Portico. This was also known as Solomon's porch (cf. John 10:23 KJV). Or if you consider the words in the ESV, John 10:23 calls it the colonnade of Solomon for good reason. It was a portico with dozens of columns running along the eastern side of the temple. But any connection with Solomon would have been in the sense of a memorial because the Babylonians had destroyed the temple he built.

As we have seen, Solomon's porch was a common meeting place for teaching and fellowship. Jesus taught crowds at this place especially in the days before He was crucified (John 10:23). The first Christians met there regularly (Acts 2:46). Peter preached his second sermon there (Acts 3:11).

But the location of the Christians' gathering is secondary to the fact that the Builder of the Church was doing miracles, working His power to cause unusual circumstances (vv.15-16). The apostles were instruments of the miracles but not the source of miracles. *Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles (v.12).*

*Signs and wonders* are good descriptive terms to describe what Christ was doing. A sign was a unique, even supernatural, unexpected event that arrested people's attention. Like a warning sign on the highway that calls attention to construction that will require a lane shift. Only Christ's sign is much more dramatic because it cannot be ignored. A wonder was even more dramatic, often connected with physiological phenomena.

God used signs and wonders throughout history to call attention to special work He was doing at the time. He used signs and wonders against the Egyptians. "*But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt*" (Exodus 7:3). He used signs and wonders to benefit Israel. "*You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in*

*Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day*" (Jeremiah 32:20). God gave signs and wonders to help pagan kings like Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:2) and Darius (Daniel 6:27). In the same way, as Christ began building His Church, He accompanied the task with signs and wonders through the apostles. They were instruments, tools, channels Christ used.

Verses fifteen and sixteen describe the extent of Christ's work. *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. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed (vv.15-16).* These miracles were not haphazard, random acts of God. They were intentional and with purpose in order to, first, attract attention to the truth of the gospel, the story about Jesus' life, death, resurrection. Christians demonstrated that truth when they responded to threats with the prayer, *And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:29-30).*

Second the purpose of the miracles was to affirm the authority of the gospel messengers. Paul argued that *the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works (2 Corinthians 12:12).* Christ proved that His apostles taught His truth by using them to do miracles. Who was going to naturally believe a controversial message declared by a handful of ignorant, unlearned fishermen, tax collector, zealot and so on?

The miracles were effective and people responded. The text says that the people believed, *that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them (v.15).* It was not that people were healed by Peter's shadow. It seems probable that the people thought Peter's shadow would heal them (like the woman who only wanted to touch Jesus' garment). But clearly the healing was the specific, intentional work of the Lord.

The result of God working miracles through His messengers was that *the people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem (v.16).* The witness was beginning to spread outside Jerusalem just as

Jesus had instructed it should. And yet we must acknowledge that probably not everyone who was healed or witnessed a loved one being healed was born again. That was the same reality during Jesus' ministry. For example, Jesus healed ten lepers but only two came back to thank Him which likely indicated that there was no change of heart in the other eight.

The Lord's miracles seemed to be pretty effective in calling attention to the gospel. So why don't we pray for miracles to call attention to the gospel? God can do any kind of work, common or stupendous, any time He wants to. But in this age, Christ gave us His completed Word which He tells us is more dependable and trustworthy than amazing events and circumstances. It is very dependable.

Many years after Christ began building the Church, the same messenger Peter wrote a very important statement about the authority of the Bible. *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:16-21).* That is why we have confidence to simply tell the word of God. *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).*

There were significant results connected to the signs and wonders Jesus did. One result was that the people respected the Christians. *None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem (v.13).* None of the unsaved people dared to hang out with the Christians who were the focus of God's amazing works. Why not?

They dared not join partly because of fear of God's power displayed in miracles. And maybe they were aloof partly because they feared God's desire for purity in the church even to the point of killing Ananias and Sapphira. They withdrew from the messengers partly because it was already clear that being a follower of Christ would bring the religious leaders' disfavor. But, mostly they dared not join the Christians because truly being part of the Church was not their choice as we will see in 5:14.

This statement should cause us to wonder how it is that people today who are clearly, admittedly, unsaved are comfortable in some churches. Is there no fear for God's standard of purity? Is there no evidence that God Himself meets with His people in corporate worship? Is there no conscience about sinning against this Almighty, Majestic God who has given us the perfect standard of his Word?

But while they would not (could not) become a part of the Church, the "other" people (the ones looking in from the outside) held the Christians in high esteem. It must have been rather like the way the Egyptian people who God was beating to a pulp had high regard and respect for the Israelites, the people of God. In the past this was the American culture's attitude toward God, the Bible, the Church and Christians. That was generally the case from the founding of this country until the 1970's. In fact, this statement could be interpreted to say, "No one wanted to join them because they were afraid of them."

What changed? Actually, it seems that maybe professing Christians DIDN'T change and that was the problem. Instead of living lives separated from sin, so-called Christians felt it was more expedient to fit in with sinners. In the early days of the Church, sinners did not feel comfortable trying to fit with saints. Now the very intelligent, all-wise professing Christians of this age have solved the problem — they will fit in with sinners. Problem Solved! Not exactly. The Lord's work of saving sinners from sin is most obvious when there is a clear distinction between sinners and saints.

Contrary to human wisdom, the way to help sinners see their need of the Savior is to live out the marked difference between the Savior and the sinner. "No," the worldly-wise man declares. "That will never work. If we do that 'none of the rest will dare to join us.'"

It seems like that is exactly what our text in the Bible says. And what was the result of this uneasy relationship?

The Lord continued to add believers. *And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women (v.14)*. It is easy for human wisdom to conclude that people believed in Christ because of the signs. In reality, the signs were simply Christ's instruments to attract attention to His gospel. Then the Holy Spirit used that interest to draw sinners to Christ. The Lord was building His Church so rapidly that Luke no longer mentioned numbers. Maybe he couldn't keep track.

### **Reaction to Christ's Authority (vv.17-21).**

As is often the case, while Jesus is busy demonstrating His unquestionable authority, humans respond by exercising their limited, finite, human authority (vv.17-18). The religious leaders did what they did because they were filled with jealousy. *But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy (v.17)*.

The high priest represented the most important religious people in the culture. This reference to the high priest might have been Annas, but more accurately would have been his son-in-law Caiaphas. He was the one who rendered the verdict regarding Jesus: *Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death" (Matthew 26:65-66)*.

Caiaphas, like any good Sadducee, was most concerned about the high position of favor his family enjoyed with the Roman government. The Sadducees talked a lot about religion and God and God's law and God's people. But because they didn't know God, they were driven by jealousy. They thought they had destroyed the Leader who was drawing the masses away from their leadership. Now these ignorant and uneducated men were doing the same thing Jesus had done and also accompanied by supernaturally powerful works.

We find that in any and every age, religious talk and devotion is not equivalent to faith in and fellowship with Christ. And very often the religious, but not born again people will do what they do

motivated by jealousy. It is a powerful emotion. Solomon warned that *wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy? (Proverbs 27:4)*.

Those humans who were motivated by jealousy decided to exercise their authority and, *they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison (v.18)*. By arresting the Lord's messengers and putting them in prison, they silenced the message of the gospel of Christ—or thought they would. These same leaders had already tried this tactic and it failed. Even after threatening the messengers of the gospel, they went right back to the temple and taught the Good News again. It appears that human authority ran up against Christ's authority and lost. When Jesus promised that He would build His Church, He also promised that the gates of death itself would not be powerful enough to imprison its victims, how much less the gates of a human prison?

The end of our text, the first part of this story, closes by revealing the activity of Christ's true authority (vv.19-21a). There was a miracle and a command. The miracle was that the Lord sent an angel to release His messengers. *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said (v.19)*. Obviously, *an angel* is the servant and messenger of the One who created it. This job was so small, the Lord did not even need to send a chief angel like Michael or Gabriel. What a wonderful illustration of the power of Christ and the weakness of those who oppose Him.

The Lord sent His messengers to disobey human authorities. His divine, authoritatively-sent messenger told Peter and John, *"Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life" (v.20)*. *The words of this Life* is the most encouraging and necessary message anyone can speak. It is the authoritative message about the abundant life found only in Jesus. It is the promise of eternal life gained only by faith in Jesus. It is the truth about new life in Christ.

It is the message all the people need to hear. It is the message Jesus gave to His messengers with the explicit instruction to go out and preach it and teach it (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). It is the same message human religious inspectors told the apostle to stop preaching. At their previous arrest, the authorities called in Peter and John *and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of*

*Jesus (Acts 4:18)*. Now the divine messenger instructed Peter and John to do exactly what the authorities told them not to do.

How did the apostles respond? They responded with complete obedience to the command. *And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach (v.21a)*. The messengers did what the Builder told them to do. At daybreak the apostles continued the building process of the Church.

And how did the authorities respond to such disobedience? As far as our chosen text goes, they didn't know. They presumptuously assumed they were the human authority and that was the end of the argument (v.21b). The council planned to decide Christ's messengers' fate. *Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council and all the senate of Israel and sent to the prison to have them brought (v.21b)*.

Once again the powerful human authorities called together their powerful council, completely unaware of the work Jesus had done. They presumptuously gave orders to bring out the imprisoned messengers of the Church Builder. But Christ the Builder thwarted the council's plans. *But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported (v.22)*. The official representatives of the chief human authorities did as they were commanded. How we wish we could have been present in that council meeting when the officers came back and reported. Imagine the guards saying, "Ummmmm, Sir, the ignorant and uneducated messengers are not in prison where you put them." It should be very shocking when human sinners suddenly realize they are not in control.

Jesus Christ promised to build His Church. In the Acts, Luke recorded how that worked. It is a most wonderful story about the conflict between human authorities and the authority of Christ. It is so encouraging to know that Jesus chose us to be on His side because He is the winner regardless of how it may appear at times in this life.