

If you remember, I mentioned last week that Acts 5 can be divided into three parts: in vv1-11, we have the church dealing with itself (Ananias and Saphira); in vv12-16, we have the church dealing with outsiders (the sick and demon-possessed); in vv17-42, we have the church dealing with her enemies (the Jewish leadership).

Furthermore, if you remember last week, I divided this last section into two parts. Thus, having considered vv17-32 last week, we come this morning to vv33-42 (just keep in mind, these verses make up a single passage and describe the second imprisonment of the apostles). And so, I want to consider vv33-42 and the theme, Rejoicing in Suffering under these two familiar headings: the passage explained and applied.

I. The Passage Explained

II. The Passage Applied

I. The Passage Explained

1. Here I intend to move through vv33-42 rather quickly, merely pointing out five primary acts or actions.
2. (1) A plot, v33—"When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them"—that is, when the high priest and Sadducees, heard what Peter had said to them in vv29-32.
3. While they murdered Christ by hanging Him upon a tree, the God of our fathers raised Him up and exalted Him.
4. Thus, those who obey Christ, not the Sanhedrin, receive repentance, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit.
5. This is why they became "furious" and "plotted to kill them"—brethren, make no mistake about it—these were evil men.
6. Religious and powerful, but evil and murderous—they began to conspire together on how to kill the apostles.
7. (2) A counsel—from vv34-39 we are introduced to another a Pharisee (who was assumedly a part of the Sanhedrin).
8. If you remember last week, I mentioned the Sanhedrin was the supreme ruling court of the Jews, as was made of 70 men taken from the Sadducees and Pharisees).
9. I further mentioned last week, that these two groups differed, in that the Sadducees were theologically liberal.
10. That is, they rejected the supernatural, which meant, they did not believe in angels or the resurrection.
11. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were at least theologically conversative, although many of them were legalistic.
12. Bruce Milne—"In contrast to the worldly, materialistic Sadducees, the Pharisees believed in the sovereignty of God, resurrection, and spirit agencies such as angels and demons, and also in the authority of oral traditions alongside the written Scriptures."
13. And so, overall, the counsel of Gamaliel was sound—he basically reminded them of two previous events.
14. V36—"For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing."

15. V37—"After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census (not to be confused with Judas Iscariot), and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed."
16. In other words, these two movements quickly passed away, with the death of the leader they obeyed (followed).
17. V38—"And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."
18. Look—give it some time—if they end like the previous two did, you know they were merely of man—but (and this is the interesting part), if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it.
19. You see, it appears that Gamaliel left open the possibility that this new movement was in fact of God.
20. This doesn't mean he was actually converted, but it does suggest that he was likely a very sincere man.
21. In fact, extra-biblical sources tell us, that the Jews highly respected Gamaliel as one of seven masters in Israel.
22. Thomas Walker—"He was a man of great learning and noble character. He had studied Greek literature, and was in advance of most of the Rabbis in culture and liberality. He was held in the highest possible status by the Jews, and was honorably named 'the beauty of the Law.' He is said to have died eighteen years before the destruction of the temple. As we know, Saul of Tarsus was one of his pupils (Acts 22:3)."
23. Thus, we learn an important lesson—God uses various means, to ensure the safety and success of His church.
24. Gamaliel wasn't a converted man, and yet, God used him as a means to protect His people, and advance His truth.
25. John Calvin—"What is 'of God' is bound to stand, even if the whole world is against him. Therefore faith, which is sustained by the eternal truth of God, ought to remain unshaken against any assaults whatever of Satan and men. Even if heaven falls, our salvation is secure, for God is its Author and Protector."
26. (3) A beating, v40—"And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."
27. Luke says that they agreed with him, but as we see, it's apparent that they were not all that convinced.
28. As they called for the apostles, beat them (or had them beaten), and then command them not to speak in the name of Jesus.
29. Darrell Bock—"The whipping would have been on the back and chest with a three-stranded strap of calf hide. This could leave one close to death, if not dead, from loss of blood. The hope is that by intensifying the punishment, a deterrent will be established. They are wrong."
30. (4) A rejoicing, v41—"So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."
31. To rejoice is to have your heart filled with joy and gladness—to be delighted in someone or something.
32. Here we learn they rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"—in other words, they rejoiced that Christ allowed them to suffer for His name.
33. This doesn't mean they were rejoicing because of the suffering, but they rejoiced for the privilege of suffering.
34. Notice, they suffered "shame for His name"—that is, their beating was intended to bring shame upon them.

35. But the apostles, turned that shame into a badge of honor—they rejoiced at such a high and blessed honor.
36. Let me remind you, that the phrase "His name" simply refers to Christ Himself—all that He is in Himself.
37. He's the GodMan Mediator, Prince and Savior, Prophet, Priest, and King; our Husband, Shepherd, and Beloved.
38. In other words, He's worthy of the allegiance of our hearts and lives, regardless what this may entail.
39. (5) A resuming, v42—"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."
40. In other words, even though they were beaten and threatened, they resumed teaching and preaching about Christ (v29—"We ought to be God rather than men").
41. In fact, if anything, it seems they increased their activity—"and daily in the temple, and in every house, they continued to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ."
42. Far from dissuading them or even slowing them down, they turned up the energy and opened their mouth more widely.

II. The Passage Applied

1. I want to take the remainder of our time, and focus in upon the theme of suffering: its nature, certainty, and privilege.
2. But before I come to this, I want to begin with something I've said about the book of Acts as a whole.
3. While everything in it is for our learning and encouragement, not everything in it is for our imitation.
4. None of us will ever likely be beaten by the Sanhedrin, because we preached the gospel in the temple courts.
5. But nevertheless, there are basic principles that this Scripture intends to teach about the nature, certainty, and privilege of suffering.
6. (1) The nature of suffering—by suffering I mean, suffering at the hands of others because we are Christian.
7. Thus, I'm not talking about all kinds of suffering—Christians suffer in ways that non-Christians suffer.
8. This is because we all live in a fallen world—we get sick, our loved ones die, we lose our jobs, just like other people.
9. But the kind of suffering I'm referring to, is what's called persecution—suffering for the name of Christ.
10. Suffering for the sake of Christ, His truth, and righteousness—thus, it's always unjust and in no way deserved.
11. 1Pet.4:16—"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."
12. This kind of suffering is unique to Christians, and it's experienced in a variety of ways and degrees (let me briefly suggest four).
13. (a) Verbal—that is, people may yell at us, call us names, and mock us—these are all forms of suffering.
14. Matt.5:11—"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake."
15. (b) Physical—by this I mean, people may physically abuse us, and as the apostles, arrest and imprison us.

16. (c) Financial—by this I mean, at times persecution may result in the loss of a promotion or our possessions.
17. Heb.10:34—"For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven."
18. (d) Relational—by this I mean, our friends and family, may reject or leave us because of our Christian beliefs.
19. (2) The certainty of suffering—while not every Christian will suffer for his faith in the same exact way, all Christians are called to suffer.
20. Matt.5:10-12—"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
21. As you know, our Savior began His first public sermon (the Sermon on the Mount), with a description of His subjects.
22. These are the blessed ones; the ones who will inherit the kingdom of God, and dwell with Christ forever.
23. These beatitudes are actually a description of Christ Himself—He was poor in Spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and persecuted.
24. But they also describe in measure, every follower of His—we are meek, merciful, pure, peaceful, and persecuted.
25. Phil.1:29—"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."
26. It's true these words are written specifically to a local church, but they provide a broad and generic principle.
27. With the gift of faith, comes the privilege to suffer—that is, to believe upon Christ and suffer for Christ.
28. 2Tim.3:12—"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"—yes, these words have a direct application to Timothy, but they have a broad application for all Christians.
29. 1Pet.4:12-13—"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."
30. All Christians will of necessity suffer for the name of Christ, the only question being, the timing, nature, and degree of suffering.
31. Here's the basic reason—man by nature hates the truth, and doesn't want to see it lived or hear it preached.
32. Thus, the suffering, hatred, and mistreatment that Christians endure, isn't so much directed at them, as it is Christ and His word.
33. Jn.15:20—"A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."
34. This is the root cause of all religious persecution—this is why every Christian will suffer for Christ—because man by nature hates Christ and His word.
35. But I think I hear someone object—"Does every unchristian person actually hate Jesus and His Word?"
36. And my simply answer would be—"Yes"—every unchristian person, by nature, hates Jesus and His word."
37. Now, it's true this hatred may not always show itself in the same way—it may be hidden or lie dormant.

38. But let the claims of Christ and His word be presented, and I assure this hatred will begin to be expressed.
39. For example, what about the fact that we are all sinners by nature, who deserve to be punished in hell; or what about the fact that salvation is only found in Jesus Christ; or what about the fact that God's law alone determines morality.
40. Few people hate the Jesus of popular opinion—the Jesus who rides in the back seat allowing you to do as you please.
41. But what about the Jesus of Holy Scripture? The Jesus who says—"He who keeps My commandments is the one who loves Me."
42. And remember, these commandments are summarized in ten, the sixth of which is "you shall not commit murder."
43. With all that's been happening lately with the Supreme Court and abortion, what if stood in the middle of one of these protests and simply and loving told these women, that abortion is always and only murder?
44. (3) The privilege of suffering—as this is at the heart of our passage, I want to spend the remainder of our time on it.
45. I've always found Acts 5:41 interesting—the apostles rejoiced at the privileged of suffering for Christ.
46. Thus, here I want to answer the question, why? Why did they consider suffering for Christ such a privilege?
47. (a) Suffering imitates Christ—by this I mean, it's a privilege for us to suffer for Him who suffered for us.
48. Because Christ was a man of sorrow and grief, we are like Him, when we too endure sorrow and grief.
49. 1Pet.2:21—"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."
50. We often hear about "being like Jesus" and "being Christlike"—but let me ask you—how did Christs act?
51. Yes, He was loving, holy, compassionate, and bold—but He was also a man of sorrow and a man of grief.
52. Thus, don't get me wrong—Christians aren't to court suffering—we are not to act in a way to invite it.
53. But we are to live in such a way so as to expect it, and to the degree that it comes, rejoice for the privilege.
54. Phil.3:10—"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I am attain to the resurrection from the dead."
55. Paul desired to know three things—he desired to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."
56. By "the fellowship of His sufferings" is meant to share in common or similar sufferings that Christ endured.
57. Paul wanted to know three things: Christ more intimately, His power more consistently, and sufferings more personally.
58. (b) Suffering interests Christ—by this I mean, Christ is especially interested in those who suffer for Him.
59. Because Christ and His people are one, there is a sense in which to persecute the church is to persecute Christ.
60. It's for this reason, our Savior asked Saul in Acts 9:4—"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"—that is, to persecute the church is to persecute Christ.

61. Heb.2:18—"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."
62. When the apostle says that Christ was tempted, he refers to the whole of Christ's life as one temptation.
63. It doesn't merely refer to the actual temptations of Satan, but to all of the suffering He endured through His life.
64. Because Christ endured such suffering, He's able to help or sympathize with those who are suffering.
65. There is a sense in which, our Savior suffers with His beloved people, as they unjustly suffer for Him.
66. Now, before I go further, let me here clarify something about Christ's present sympathy with His people.
67. Remember, while Christ is one person He possesses two natures—one is truly divine, the other truly human.
68. While on earth, Christ suffered in His human nature, He died on the cross, was buried in a tomb, and raised again on the third day.
69. Following this, 40 days later, He was exalted to the right hand of the Father, as Prince and Savior of His people.
70. Thus, Christ's human nature is at present glorified in heaven—this means it can no longer experience pain or sorrow.
71. This begs an important question—In what way does Christ presently sympathize with His suffering people?
72. Brethren, remember, according to the book of Revelation, those in heaven remember what they were by nature (they remember, they were sinners by nature, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb).
73. And so too, though Christ is now beyond all present suffering in heaven, He remembers what it's like to suffer.
74. As a result, Heb.2:18 says—"He is able to aid those who are tempted"—He's able to give them help.
75. And how does He do this? Well, He does so by drawing uniquely close to them by His gracious Holy Spirit.
76. He knows what it's like to endure verbal, physical, and relational suffering (in degrees no other person does).
77. Perhaps we can say, while Christ is interested with all His people, He has a special interest for those suffering for His name.
78. He draws near to them by His Spirit, enabling them to know that He cares for them and sympathizes with them.
79. (c) Suffering glorifies Christ—that is, it tells the world that Christ is worthy of all their hatred and rejection.
80. Think of it like this—on one hand you have the acceptance of this world, and on the other you have Christ.
81. Which of these are preferred? Which of them are of greater value? Well, the apostles chose the latter.
82. That is, they chose Christ (even though He comes with suffering), and they despised the hatred of this world.
83. Every time we endure suffering for Christ, we in essence are saying, He's worthy of our service even if it means we face the hatred and mistreatment of this world.

84. Hymn (550)—"Jesus, priceless treasure, fount of purest pleasure, truest friend to me; ah, how long in anguish shall my spirit languish, yearning, Lord, for thee? Thine I am, O spotless Lamb! I will suffer naught to hide thee, naught I ask beside thee."