

## Acts 5 – The Awesome Power of God

So far in our study in Acts we have been seeing the power of God at work through people filled with the Holy Spirit. Now in Acts 5 we see the awesome power of God present in judgement because Satan has filled the heart of Ananias who with the agreement of his wife has sought to deceive the church. A deceit that God sees as a lie to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira have seen the way Barnabas and others sold property and gave the proceeds to the apostles to give to the poor among the believers. It seems that they had some property which they agreed to sell in order to give the proceeds in the same way as the others but on closing the deal the temptation to keep some of the money was too great. So as not to lose face they agreed to say that they had sold the property at a lower price and were giving all the proceeds. They were seeking human praise, not the praise of God.

“If the devil's first tactic was to destroy the church by force from without, his second was to destroy it by falsehood from within”<sup>1</sup> Ananias and Sapphira were willing accomplices in his scheme and their judgement was swift and deadly. It is an uncomfortable story for us to read but a strong reminder that our God is holy and when his power is present it is a dangerous holiness. “But if we took the underlying message of Acts 5 more seriously, we might perhaps expect to see more of the other bits of Acts, the bits we all prefer, coming true in our communities as well.”<sup>2</sup> Like the description of how the Spirit of God was at work through the apostles with many miraculous signs and wonders as the believers met together in the temple precincts. Although people feared to join them because of the awesome power of God, nevertheless, many became believers.

Having failed one way the devil returns again to an attempt to destroy the church by force. The high priest and his associates were “filled with jealousy” seeing the apostles as a threat to the temple and their power. They rose up had the apostles arrested and thrown into prison, clearly intent on stopping their preaching and healing ministry. No doubt they retired to bed feeling back in control but they reckoned without the power of God. An angel releases the apostles and sends them back to the temple to “tell the people the full message of this life.”

The Sanhedrin is called together and officers sent to the jail to get the apostles, only to find it securely locked and guarded but empty! The apostles were eventually found in the temple teaching and asked politely to go to the Sanhedrin because the officers feared being stoned by the people. They were charged with disobeying the order not to teach in the name of Jesus and aggravating this by determining to make the Jewish leaders guilty of his death. Peter and the apostles do not deny the charge but state again that “We must obey God rather than men” then proceed to preach Jesus, once again emphasising the part of the Sanhedrin in his death.

Furious the leaders want to put the apostles to death but are stopped by Gamaliel, a Pharisee, “a teacher of the law who was honoured by all the people”. He advised them to leave the apostles alone because “if their activity is of human origin it will fail” but if not they could find they were fighting God. This advice was followed, the apostles were released after a flogging and left rejoicing, to return to their daily preaching Jesus as the Christ.

---

1 John Stott, 1990, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today, IVP

2 Tom Wright, 2008, *Acts for Everyone Part 1*, SPCK



## Acts

5. Compare the attitude and behaviour of the authorities with the action and instruction of the angel. What do you think Luke wants us to see here? (Acts 5: 17-26)
  
6. To what extent was the high priest correct in the charge he brought against the apostles? What was it that the Sanhedrin missed in the apostles preaching that should have changed their whole attitude? (Acts 5: 27-31)
  
7. How was Gamaliel able to control the fury of the Sanhedrin? To what extent do you think his advice in verses 38-39 is a high risk strategy? (Acts 5: 33-39)
  
8. How did the apostles react to being flogged (presumably the 40 lashes less 1), and the order not to speak in the name of Jesus? What do you think enabled them to react in this way? (Acts 5: 41-42 cf Luke 6:22-23)

### **Commit**

- “It is ... the claim of the early church that God the creator has acted in Jesus Christ to sort the world out and set it right. Those who make that claim, and live by that claim, must expect to be judged by that claim.”<sup>3</sup> How serious are you about making

---

3 Tom Wright, 2008, Acts for Everyone Part 1, SPCK

## Acts

that claim? To what extent do you live by it? How fearful are you of the dangerous holiness of God?

- “We must obey God rather than men!” In what situations is it right to disobey human authorities? How do you decide when you should disobey?
- “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 Christ. (Acts 5: 42) This was after they had been flogged and disgraced. What do we need to do to see the power of God at work to add daily people to our church?”