

“Opposition Increases”
(Acts 5:17-32)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw the sin of Ananias and Sapphira.
 - a. Not that they didn't have the right of private ownership.
 - b. But they sold their property, pledged the full amount, but gave only part.
 - c. In doing this:
 - (i) They showed their pride: they wanted to be thought of as exceptional Christians.
 - (ii) And their greed: they weren't able to let the money go: it possessed them.
 - (iii) But their greatest sin was lying to the Holy Spirit.
 - (a) They lied when they said they wanted to do this by His prompting.
 - (b) They lied when they brought the money to Him, when they laid it at the feet of the apostles.
2. God, for His part, did another sign and wonder: He struck them down on the spot.
 - a. Miracles can be of two kinds: mercy and judgment.
 - (i) He worked mainly miracles of mercy: to show that He is gracious, that there is hope.
 - (ii) But He also did miracles of justice:
 - (a) Throughout the Old Covenant.
 - (b) And even in the New – to show that He is holy.
 - b. This one really struck terror in the hearts of those who saw it inside and outside the church.
 - (i) God showed them that He was holy and would be treated as holy.
 - (ii) It made them afraid – that's a good thing: the fear of the Lord.
 - (iii) And the Lord advanced His kingdom through this miracle and others.
 - (a) He brought about many more merciful signs and wonders, so that they brought their sick from all around, laid them in the streets, that Peter's shadow might touch them.
 - (b) He caused the unbelieving Jews to fear and respect His people.
 - (c) And He brought multitudes of men and women to saving faith in Christ.

B. Preview.

1. Now with the Lord moving His kingdom forward at this pace, opposition is sure to arise.
 - a. Satan doesn't take these things lying down.
 - (i) Edwards wrote that the devil will do all he can to hold a revival back.
 - (ii) Here, we see him still trying to stop the kingdom from advancing by using his own children in high places.

- b. In spite of this, the Lord is sovereign and continued to advance His work no matter the opposition.
- 2. This morning, we see that there is never any good work that is done for God that isn't opposed by the enemy. But God, by His grace, gives us victory.
 - a. First, we see the opposition of the enemy.
 - b. But second, the grace and deliverance of God.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we see the reaction of the spiritual leaders of Israel to this work of God: "But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail" (vv. 17-18).
 - 1. The high priest and Sadducees were filled with jealousy.
 - a. The word means either jealousy or fiery indignation.
 - b. Literally, they were controlled by hatred/anger.
 - c. Again, Annas and Caiaphas were concerned that they would lose their prestige/authority if the Gospel should gain ground.
 - d. The Sadducees joined them because the Gospel confirmed the resurrection, the existence of the invisible world, the future state and punishment, which they denied.
 - e. They were resolved to put an end to this once and for all.
 - 2. When they saw what the Lord was doing through the apostles, how the people were following them, they had them arrested and put in jail.
 - a. They hadn't broken any law, but they wanted to silence them.
 - b. They probably thought this display of power would frighten them.
 - c. At least it might have the effect of disgracing them in the eyes of the people.
 - (i) We shouldn't think this is strange: it would have been strange if they didn't react in some violent way.
 - (ii) Satan is always working against the kingdom: we must count on it.
 - d. And so they put them in jail until they could gather the Council together for next day.
- B. But God didn't leave them to fend for themselves: He sent them divine help. "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life'" (vv. 19-20). Satan was fighting against them, but God was fighting for them. Our Lord Jesus said He would be with them (and with us) until the end. He sent an angel to let them out of prison and renew their commission to preach – Angels don't often appear, but they are still ministering spirits sent to render service to those who inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14).
 - 1. First, the angel set them free.
 - a. The Lord can do this, since He is the Judge of judges and the One who judges righteously.

- b. He considered this arrest and imprisonment as unjust.
 - (i) The Lord can set us free whenever He pleases: He can overrule courts and penal systems.
 - (ii) Nothing can hold us back when the Lord wills we move forward.
 - c. Through the angel, He charged them to continue with their work.
 - (i) For now, they were not to be concerned about what the priests had in store.
 - (ii) They were to get back to the work: They were not set free to run away, but to put their hand back to the plow (Luke 9:62).
 - (iii) Whenever we're in danger or imprisoned, and the Lord grants us continued health and liberty, it is always to continue to do His will (Ps. 119:175; 143:7).
 - (iv) They were to go back to the Temple, back to that public place of worship, back to the seat of opposition, but back to where the people were. It was still God's house – it hadn't yet been left desolate.
 - (a) We must never back down from opportunities to bring a Gospel witness, even if it is potentially dangerous, especially when He commands us to do so.
 - (b) They were to take their stand in the Temple and speak to the people, not the princes and rulers, because they wouldn't listen.
 - (v) And notice again what they were to speak: "the whole message of this life (v. 20).
 - (a) The Gospel alone is the word that gives life: it is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16).
 - (b) The whole Gospel must be preached and nothing held back: we may not add or take away as we please.
- 2. Next, they did what they were told. "Upon hearing *this*, they entered into the temple about daybreak and *began* to teach" (v. 21).
 - a. Jesus earlier had told them when they were persecuted in one city, they were to flee to the next (Matt. 10:23).
 - (i) But it was only the leaders who were now rejecting Christ, not the people.
 - (ii) And besides this, the angel gave them explicit command.
 - b. And so they immediately obeyed.
 - (i) They entered the temple in the morning and began again to teach the people.
 - (ii) This could only make the leaders angrier, but they were willing to do this because God commanded it.
 - (iii) Humanly speaking, if they were to fail now – since the Gospel had been entrusted to them – the whole work of God might fail.
 - (iv) But the Lord isn't going to let this happen.
- 3. Next, we see that the apostles were persecuted further for their disobedience.
 - a. The high priest and the Sadducees called a Council – the whole senate of Israel – which had only one purpose: to stop the Gospel. "Now when the high priest

and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel” (v. 21).

- (i) The last time there were only a few present.
 - (ii) Now they were calling all the eldership: “That is (says Dr. Lightfoot), all the three courts or benches of judges in Jerusalem, not only the great Sanhedrim, consisting of seventy elders, but the other two judicatories that were erected one in the outer-court gate of the temple, the other in the inner or beautiful gate, consisting of twenty-three judges each; so that, if there was a full appearance, here were one hundred and sixteen judges” (Henry’s Commentary).
 - (iii) The high priest was thinking to rally all his forces against them to prevent this teaching from spreading any further; but apparently God wanted a more public testimony against the elders of Israel.
- b. When they called for the prisoners to be brought, they were disappointed. They “sent *orders* to the prison house for them to be brought. But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, saying, ‘We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside’” (vv. 21-23).
- (i) Here is an example of God mocking the rulers of the earth who seek to stop His work: God laughs at them (Ps. 2:4).
 - (a) The high priest probably made a speech, setting the solemnity of the situation.
 - (b) There is a dangerous sect threatening to split their church – they need to suppress it.
 - (c) They had their ringleaders imprisoned; they must be severe.
 - (d) They call for the prisoners, but the officers return to tell them there are none.
 - (e) The prison doors are shut, the guards are at the door, but their prisoners are nowhere to be found.
 - (f) Henry remarks that perhaps the other prisoners were still there.
 - (g) No one knew where they were. They were disappointed, thinking the matter would have been resolved one way or the other if they had them.
 - (ii) They were further disappointed to find that the men they were looking for were in the temple again doing what they had commanded them not to do.
 - (a) Prisoners who escape usually run away: these went back to doing what they were arrested for in the first place.
 - (b) The Lord not only knows how to deliver His people, He knows how to command their affections.
- c. They sent and had the apostles arrested again.
- (i) Why did God let them go to have them arrested again? Perhaps to subdue their enemies, to humble them, to check their vengeance.

- (ii) But they brought them without violence: not because they were afraid the Lord might strike them down as He had Ananias and Sapphira, but because they were afraid of the people.
- d. And they examined them.
 - (i) They had disobeyed their express command:
 - (a) Didn't they tell them not to teach in this name?
 - (b) Weren't they preaching without the consent of the Council and against their command.
 - (c) Yes, but Peter had told them they must obey God.
 - (ii) Not only did they not obey them, they had filled Jerusalem with their teaching and were drawing the people away from the established church.
 - (iii) They charged them of doing this maliciously: "you intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (v. 28).
 - (a) Isn't it funny when people do evil things and refuse to stop when you warn them, how they hate to hear about what they did later when you charge them with sin?
 - (b) When Pilate said he would not be guilty of Jesus' death, the Jews all cried out that they would accept the blame.
 - (c) The Jewish leaders were the guiltiest in this regard, but now they deny it.
- 4. But again, we see them give a bold argument for their disobedience:
 - a. First, they had a higher authority they had to obey: "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'" (v. 29).
 - (i) They answered in the same way they did at first.
 - (ii) To do this in the face of those who could put them to death required the help of the Holy Spirit.
 - (iii) We must fear the Lord and not be intimidated by men.
 - b. Second, this was the only message of life, the only way for Israel to be saved, and so to be silent would seal Israel's destruction: they must preach the Gospel, even to these rulers: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and *so is* the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him" (vv. 30-32).
 - (i) Notice Peter begins by bringing home their sin:
 - (a) He didn't excuse himself or the other apostles, or ask for their forgiveness, but charges them again for the murder of Jesus.
 - (b) Just because someone doesn't want to hear something doesn't mean we shouldn't tell them.
 - (ii) But God raised Him up again and exalted Him to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior. This means three things:
 - (a) Jesus is alive: death could not hold Him.

- (b) He is the only source of salvation: He is the Savior of mankind, especially of Israel.
 - (c) But He must also be submitted to as Lord: Israel, or anyone else for that matter, cannot have Christ for their Savior who doesn't also receive Him as their Lord.
 - (d) As Henry writes, He didn't come to save us in our sins, but from our sins.
 - (e) Notice the connection between repentance and forgiveness. You can't have one without the other. There is no forgiveness without repentance; there is no salvation from the guilt of sin unless there is freedom from its bondage.
 - (f) He was sent as a prince and Savior to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins, which is why they must preach the Gospel.
 - (g) Christ is the one who is authorized to give both, and Christ alone. Only He can change the heart and make us willing.
- (iii) Finally, Peter says that the Lord has provided witnesses for Himself.
- (a) The apostles themselves – they had seen the risen Christ – which was compelling enough for these leaders to receive their testimony (two or three witnesses).
 - (1) Notice these apostles were willing to risk their lives again and again for the Gospel.
 - (2) If they had known the resurrection was a hoax, why would they have done that?
 - (b) And the Holy Spirit, who was bearing witness:
 - (1) Through the signs, wonders and miracles.
 - (2) Through the apostles' preaching and teaching with power.
 - (3) Through the evidence of changed lives: power, love, discipline.
 - (4) Today we still have the eyewitness accounts and miracles recorded in Scripture, plus the continuing preaching, witnessing and testimony of changed lives to show that the Gospel is true.
 - (5) There will always be opposition to the Gospel.
 - (6) But there will also be the power of the Lord in His church moving His kingdom forward.
 - (7) This morning, if you hear His voice in His Word, listen to what He says to you: if you haven't done so, repent of your sins, trust in Christ and submit to Him as your Lord, and you will have eternal life.
 - (8) This evening, we'll consider their further reaction and God's further protection. Amen.