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Acts 5:12-42

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Acts 5:12. We are going to cover a lengthy passage of Scripture and I want to begin by reading the entire passage. Sometimes we do it that way and sometimes we don’t. If you are visiting, we do just go through books of the Bible here and we are in Acts 5. I’m going to read a lengthy passage of Scripture.

I kind of overhead this about a guy who came and visited last week. He was really excited and interested in the prospect of maybe joining Red Oak and I thought, man, that’s a likeminded brother if he shows up on the week that Ananias and Sapphira get struck dead and he wants to join this church. That’s a good sign. That was a heavy story last week, really heavy. I want to say as a sobering warning, going into this text, and I am just reiterating it because Rob nailed it in his sermon last week—that sermon was so reminiscent to me of his Hebrews 6 sermon from several years ago when we were just a church plant team. We weren’t even a church yet. But they are sober warnings that believers need to heed, when you think about what happened with Achan, and when you look at Ananias and Sapphira, and the idea that your sin matters to the church, it matters to your family, it matters to the community, and it matters to God. He has declared you righteous and He has declared you holy through the blood and the work of Jesus, if you’re a Christian, but your sin matters to Him. Paul would say it this way in Romans 6:1, “Should we continue in sin so that grace may abound and increase? Absolutely not. “God forbid,” is what he would say. Then, in Romans 2, he says, “Should we presume on the kindness of the Lord?” No, God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. So we need to be very fearful when we approach God, even to read His Word, hear His Word, and study His Word. I can tell you and I can assure you that the scariest thing I do any moment in my life is to stand and preach the Word of God, and this is the fourth time I’ve preached it this weekend, and it’s the fourth time I’ve been scared, literally, especially dealing with these types of passages.

Okay, verse 12,

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. 13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. 14 And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 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. 16 The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” 21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25 And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” 26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

33 When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. 36 For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. 38 So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Let’s pray.

Lord, I pray that you would bless the hearing of your Word, the reading of your Word, and the instruction that comes from your Word, and that you would help us to follow you more faithfully because of your Word. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

So, let’s get to work. Our text starts off with signs and wonders regularly done. Now, you see that phrase “regularly done” and that tells me and it tells you, the reader, the hearer, that this was not something that you might randomly see happen. I don’t know if you’ve ever tried to go and witness something that happens on occasion in nature or you missed it or you didn’t get to see it. I think of the eclipse last year. Everybody came to town to see the eclipse and the eclipse was pretty cool. I wasn’t let down by the eclipse. I’m not going to lie; that was pretty cool. But I just kept having this feeling beforehand like what if it’s cloudy, you know? What if it rains that day? It rains here a lot. But it didn’t, and we got to see it, and it was awesome. But imagine trying to go and see the disciples, the Apostles, perform some miracle or sign. You didn’t have to try hard because it was happening all the time. It was regularly happening. Remember, God was doing these signs and wonders through them to establish the Church, to draw people in, and to empower the Gospel to be proclaimed, and it says that a lot of people were getting saved.

Now, it says “multitudes.” Multitudes is a lot of people. How many is a multitude? How many is multitudes, plural? I don’t know but it’s a lot. There were a lot of people getting saved. What if a lot of people started getting saved at Red Oak? Would that excite you? It would excite me. We should not be a church that’s okay not seeing people come to faith in Jesus. All the time, that should be happening. That starts with us praying and sharing Christ with our friends. Multitudes were coming to faith in Jesus because the Word of God was being proclaimed. They were asking for boldness, and God was giving them boldness, and they were proclaiming the Gospel. They were loving people well and they were caring about people. There was a lot of visible impact. The power of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles was very evident. Many were being shaped by the Gospel.

Now, we can break down what’s happening. They are healing people and proclaiming the Gospel, teaching in Solomon’s Portico, there in the Temple. So, they are doing these miracles, and they are teaching the Bible, and one of three things is happening. Everybody is responding. Listen, when you teach or preach the Gospel, everyone has to respond. God gives me the opportunity to preach in a lot of different venues and I’m really thankful for that. I enjoy getting to do that and there is always this question; people will say, “How many decisions were made?” Have you ever heard that? Maybe you’ve even asked that question, “How many decisions were made?” So, maybe there are 5000 people in that building, and the Gospel is preached, and I’ll say, “5000 decisions were made.” Because when you hear the preaching of the Gospel, or you read the Word of God, or you open God’s Word, you have to make a decision of how you are going to respond to that. Now, we know that people are asking, “How many salvation decisions were made?” but the point that I want to make is that you’ve got to respond to Jesus when you open His Word. You’ve got to respond. When we prepare sermons to preach at Red Oak, there is always going to be an application that puts in front of you your duty and your response to the preaching of the Word. That’s the job of the preacher. So, these guys are doing a good job of that.

Now, there are three ways that people respond. The first way is that there is conversion through faith and acceptance of the Gospel. That’s happening with a lot of people. A lot of people are getting saved. The second way is that that there is admiration over the good work of healing and miracles but not true conversion. Do you ever see that happen where there are people who are sort of drawn to the work of the Church? I’ve often heard this after I’ve preached a sermon, “That was a really good speech you gave.” There is something that they were drawn to but they don’t really understand the weight of the Gospel being preached. You see in some people that there’s an admiration for what the Apostles are doing but not true conversion. We see this in our society. You’ll see people who are cool with your faith. They are okay with your Christianity. They might even celebrate it, or they worship another god and think that we can celebrate other gods the same or different ways. So, oftentimes there’s admiration but not true conversion. Then, third, what we are going to get to there in verse 17 is that there was also persecution that stemmed from jealousy.

So, you have people coming to faith in Jesus. Signs and wonders lead to the preaching of the Gospel. Let me give you a timeline, like a chain of events. There were signs and wonders being done; miracles and people being healed. Shadows of the apostles fall on people and people get healed. Don’t expect TV evangelists to duplicate and replicate this. We’ve already talked about this. This is something extremely supernatural and very specific in history. So, God is doing this incredible work and people are being healed, and as a result there is a platform to preach the Gospel. Everybody is coming at this point to the same place, this place called Solomon’s Portico. People are getting healed, the Gospel is being preached, and there is a huge response. Some people are being saved, all these other people are admiring what’s happening, and then there is jealousy on the part of the religious leaders because they’ve never had this type of response when they preach. They’ve never had this kind of excitement in the city over their ministry. So, they are not excited about it at all; in fact, they are driven by jealousy. Verse 17 says they are “filled with jealousy.” Jealousy eats you alive. Jealousy is the kind of thing that will absolutely destroy you. If you are not content with what God has given you or called you to, it’s really hard not to spin out like these men have spun out. This kind of jealousy is never good. It comes from comparison and insecurity and it’s driven by greed. There is an appropriate kind of jealousy. God is even jealous for His own glory. A husband would be jealous for his wife’s affection and vice versa. There are certain things we don’t share with someone else. We are jealous for that relationship. But this kind of jealousy is an envy, in fact, some Bible translations will use the word ‘envy.’ I think the Christian Holman Standard Version and maybe the NIV use that. There are some versions that use the word ‘envy.’

In verse 18 they are cast into a public prison. Maybe you’ve heard that Jesus, and I think the Apostle Paul, also, said that we should go visit people in prison. Have you ever heard that? That’s because in those days the public prison was a place where if people didn’t bring you food you didn’t get fed. There was no cable TV, there were no clean showers, there were no three square meals a day, and there were no smoke breaks, smoke yard, or wheeling and dealing with cigarettes. It was a bad place. So, when believers would go to prison it would rest on the church body to take them food and go visit them. Don’t forget them there. This was a public prison and a really bad place to be. So, these guys were there in the prison and what happened then was this really miraculous thing where an angel showed up and led these guys out of prison. So, the religious leaders took them and threw them into prison. Why did they throw them into prison? Because they had been preaching the Gospel and preaching in the name of Jesus. They had already been warned. They had their warning and they disobeyed. They kept preaching.

By the way, is it okay to disobey the government? Okay, there were some excited ‘yesses’ to that. I think that is a good answer but it needs to be qualified. Is it okay to steal or drive 15-20 miles over the speed limit? No, you are going to have to pay the consequences. So, this is important that we understand when civil disobedience is okay. As thinking Christians—one of my favorite podcasts to listen to is Ravi Zacharias’ *Let My People Think[[1]](#footnote-1)*. Too many Christians don’t think. Why, and when, and how would it be okay to break the law or go against civil authority? The simple, short answer is this: When God’s moral law and authority—God’s given law or the law written on the hearts of men—what God has said is law and true—when that contradicts with civil law and authority, we always obey God’s law. In fact, you see it there in verse 29, where Peter says, “We must obey God rather than men.” So, in verses 18-26, you have this situation where the Apostles are disobeying the law.

There are many times in history where God preserved the Church, and advanced the Church through the disobedience of rebel Christians. I’ll give you some examples. Did you ever hear of a man named Athanasius? In the fourth century there was a teaching that became very popular and prevalent in the Church. Now, when I say ‘in the Church’ this would have been the early surge and spread of what is the modern day Roman Catholic Church. Athanasius was a pastor, a preacher, a teacher of the Gospel, and there was a very prevalent heresy. You know what a heresy is? I want Red Oak members to know what a heresy is. A heresy is a teaching that is demonic, and false, and goes against the true doctrine of Scripture. So, don’t throw that word around and call somebody a heretic if they’re not. It is literally assigning demonic activity to somebody. But there was a heresy that was being spread called Arianism. What it basically did was call into question the deity of Christ. Modern religions still hold to Arianism. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints hold to this and they reject the innate deity of Jesus. They say that He acquired deity but it wasn’t an innate deity; in other words, they reject the Triune God and say that God doesn’t exist in three Persons. The word Arianism simply comes from the man who sort of authored this heresy and his name was Arius. So, Arianism was very prevalent in the Church and became very popular in the Church. It was spreading across the Church and there is a point in history where one man named Athanasius stood firm against the wall of Arianism that was prevalent in the Church and God preserved the Church, literally, because of this one man’s faithfulness. And his faithfulness required him to go against civil authority, against papal authority, and against governmental authority, and as a result he was exiled, I believe eleven times in his life. He had to go live in the desert to flee persecution and death. But God used that man’s rebellion to save the Church.

There were two men you will know the names of, John Wycliffe and William Tyndale. What do we associate those guys with? Bible translation and publication. In fact, both of those names are attached to publishing companies today. John Wycliffe’s name is attached to the largest global Bible translation ministry in the world today. They’ve been called Wycliffe Bible Translators for years. They translate the Scripture. When we were working with the Extreme Team down in Peru—that’s now the Echelon Team in South Sudan and Northern Uganda—the people group we engaged were called the Yaminawa, and the Yaminawa now have Scripture in their language because of the partnerships between our teams and the Wycliffe Bible Translators who went and translated the Scripture. So, John Wycliffe and William Tyndale are known for translating the Bible. Both of them were persecuted and a bounty was put on their heads because they were translating Scripture and they were doing so against governmental authority, papal authority, and Church authority. They were outlaws. They were rebels. In fact, William Tyndale had to flee from England to other parts of Europe. And do you know what he did in his exile? He continued to translate the Scripture. So, there are times when rebellion against government is a good thing.

Did you ever hear of a guy named Martin Luther? If you went to church here last October, we did a five-week series on the Protestant Reformation, and Martin Luther is the guy who gets most associated with it. Although he wasn’t ‘the guy’ he’s the one who sort of gets associated most often with it. Again, Martin Luther was a rebel. He went against papal authority and against governmental authority. So, this happens. There are going to be times in history where God uses the disobedience of godly people.

Now, here’s a dilemma. Let me take you to a conversation that Kilby, and Little, and I had with the guys and gals in India. This sermon is live on the worldwide web and you guys by now know the drill on Sundays; we have to be careful what we say. But there were a couple of conversations that we had in this last training that we did. Here was the question from those people: “When we get home from this training, should we preach the Gospel boldly and loudly and throughout our villages, knowing that we are going to be thrown into jail and possibly killed? Get one good sermon out and then get thrown into jail? Or should we be really quiet, and build relationships, and try to do it person by person?” Now, that’s a real legitimate dilemma, isn’t it? What’s the answer to that? Well, there’s not a right answer to that. Because in Scripture we see times where the Apostles would stand and preach the Gospel. This is what’s just happened in our story. They preached the Gospel from the center of the city, the most populated part of the city, when they’ve been warned, “Do not preach in this Man’s name.” They’ve already spent some time in jail. “Don’t do it. We are coming after you if you do it.” But they walk out there just as bold as they can be and they preach the Gospel. They get thrown into jail in the story tonight and right in the middle of the story they break out of jail and go right back out and preach the Gospel. That’s rebellion. But, do you know that in Acts 9—we’re talking about just a little bit of time later—the Apostle Paul sneaks out of a city and escapes like a coward. He climbs over the wall and lets them drop him down and he escapes and runs into the night. Only he was not acting like a coward; he was using discernment, and discretion, and the Holy Spirit was prompting him to do that. It’s not time for him to die. At times, Jesus would say, “I’m leaving, because if I stay they’re going to kill me and it’s not my time.” Eventually, there was a time where He laid down His life.

So, there will be times in a church where we disobey government. If the day comes in this country, and it will come—When I was a kid it was like, “In your lifetime you’re going to see this.” I don’t know. IIt could be 200 years from now. The day will come. The day will come when you will no longer be able to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in that day we will be called on to commit civil disobedience and face the consequences for that. Now, we need to be practical. Here’s what this doesn’t mean. If you’re a public school teacher—I’m going to use that as an example—this doesn’t mean that you sort of throw your hand up at the system and say, “I know I’m not allowed to preach the Gospel in the classroom but I’m going to do it anyway.” That’s different. You have signed a contract and agreed to work for that organization or that agency. That’s different. If you have agreed to work and have signed a contractual agreement to work for a company that says you cannot proselytize, then guess what? Don’t proselytize. You agreed to it. Or look for ways to build relationships, be creative, look for opportunities, and use what Jesus would say as He was commissioning people to go out and proclaim the Gospel—use the wisdom of serpents and the humility of doves. Be wise. I have a family member who is a public school educator and in his career he has led I believe six or seven high school teenagers to Christ, to faith in Jesus, sitting beside his desk in his classroom. But it was with much discretion and the building of relationships. We’ve got to be careful.

We’ve seen street preachers. When I was a kid there was a guy who stood on the courthouse steps in Waynesville, North Carolina, every Saturday morning. The guy freaked me out as a kid. He would stand on the courthouse steps and he was a street preacher. If you’ve never heard a street preacher you don’t know what you’re missing. I’ll be honest with you, I admire him to this day. I admire his courage. I don’t know that his tactic was the most effective but I admire his courage.

I was preaching up in Canada with some of our Canadian brothers and sisters up there and I spent some time at Faithway Baptist Church. We stopped off at Niagara Falls and to see Niagara Falls like any good Southerner would want to do. I wanted to see this big water spigot that everyone keeps talking about so we stopped, and peeled off, and we were checking it out, and looking at it. We were walking down a really crowded street and there was a street preacher. He was calling people out, “You’re going to Hell. You’re a whore. You’re the Devil.” But we don’t see that happen in the street preaching of the book of Acts. So, there’s a need for boldness in our lives and looking for opportunities to preach the Gospel and looking for opportunities to share Christ. There is also a need for humility, and discernment, and discretion, and we need to be careful. Does the Scripture use the word ‘whore’? Yes. Would it be prudent for me to use that terminology in a public setting? No, it would be a horrible thing to do.

So, what we have here, I believe, is an answer to the prayer of Acts 4:29. Let’s go back to verse 29 of Acts 4. We’ve continued to go back to this verse.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,

Remember, they’re praying and asking God to give them boldness. I think that what we’re seeing in Acts 5, as these guys leave the prison and go right back out and preach, is we are seeing the answer to that prayer. There’s boldness. Would you say that they’re bold? I’d say that they’re bold.

We get to verses 29-32 and there is this confrontation where Peter gets really aggressive. Again, he’s using humility and he’s using wisdom. Listen in verse 29. Now, remember, they’ve brought multiple of the Apostles together here.

Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

So, what Peter does is fantastic. I want y’all to think back. We’ve already heard three sermons from Peter. Remember, after the first sermon, it says, “And with many more words he convinced them.” He preached a long-winded, old-fashioned sermon, like the ones I grew up listening to.

I grew up going to tent meetings in Haywood County. Every summer there were two preachers a night, two choirs a night, special Southern Gospel music every night, and from about the time I can remember we got dragged there. It was two weeks, fourteen days straight, every summer, in a tent revival, in a big hay field by Bethel Elementary School. They would preach, and sing, and preach, and sing, and we would start about 7pm and be over about 10pm. That’s the way they did church in Acts. People get really nervous if it goes past about an hour and fifteen around here. “Whoo! How long is this going to last?” We try to keep it in that timeframe.

So, Peter has preached these long sermons but he just preached a thirty-five word sermon. Thirty-one words in the Greek. Do you see what happened? They brought him out and he has this proclamation of the Gospel whittled down to a thirty-five word presentation. You know what that tells me? You and I need to be ready and when all we can do is give a quick Gospel presentation, let’s be ready to give an account for the Gospel. If you want to study a condensed version of the Gospel proclamation, what he says to them in those verses, 29-32, is awesome. And he says, “We’re going to obey God. We’re not going to obey people.” He’s not ugly about it. He’s like, “Okay, so here’s the thing. We are not going to obey y’all if it contradicts what God tells us.” He’s not saying anything disrespectful or defiant. It’s defiance but he’s saying it just matter-of-factly. “We are going to do what God says.” Then, he’s like, “Oh, and while you’re listening…” Boom! And he preaches the Gospel. They’ve already heard him preach the Gospel but he preaches it again.

Jeremy Higle is the man we first began to work with in the Himalayas. He’s now out of there so we’re doing that work that he started. I remember him telling us when he came here, “Listen, we want to be able to give a three-minute Gospel presentation.” It’s important to be able to do that and to look for opportunities to do that. So, here’s what I like to call a Gospel blast and Peter covers the bases. Look at all the bases he covers: “You killed Jesus. God raised Jesus. Then God exalted Him. He’s Leader and Savior. He’ll give repentance to Israel and He will forgive folks that ask for it.” That’s a pretty good Gospel proclamation. Peter is always preaching Jesus. He used every opportunity to do this, and he says in verse 32 that he’s a witness. He says, “We are witnesses,” and this is another strong evidence for the reality of the resurrection. Remember, these men who are so bold in this proclamation ran away on the night that Jesus was executed. They are never again going to be intimidated into being silent or not associating with Jesus.

We come to verses 33-42, the last section, and we come to the final wave of persecution against the disciples in this scene. Until this point, verbal threats have been made, the disciples have been jailed a couple of times, but they’re not going to stop preaching Jesus. Peter tells them, “We’re not going to stop preaching Jesus.” Verse 33 says that the leaders were enraged and wanted to kill the disciples. Think about that for a minute. Go back. In verse 17, it says they were filled with jealousy and in verse 33 it says they are enraged. What ratcheted it up? The audacity of the disciples to say, “We’re going to preach Jesus. Let me show you what we’re going to preach.” Then they preach Jesus. It’s like the Sanhedrin is there saying, “You’ve got to stop doing this!” “Stop doing what? This?” And they start preaching again. I love it. I love their audacity and I love their boldness. They summarized it and basically said this, “You killed Jesus by crucifixion. God raised Jesus supernaturally. So, we’re going to obey God instead of you. Just sayin’. That’s how it’s going to happen. It’s outstanding.

They were enraged and they wanted to kill them. Have you ever been around somebody when they completely lose their cool? I can think of a couple of times in my life when someone that I had never seen raise their voice, or be ugly, who had a very calm demeanor, and was very agreeable—and they snap. Have you ever had that experience? You just kind of sit there, shaking your head, quietly, and then you’re like, “My bad. That’s my bad.” With these leaders, it’s been a kind of build up where they’ve said, “You guys need to stop doing this preaching thing.” Then, they come back around and they say, “We’re warning you; stop doing the preaching thing.” Then, they get jealous, and they’re like, “Stop it!” Then, it goes through the roof and it’s, “Now, we’re going to kill you!” This just got real.

Let me ask you something. I’m going to pull up this stool and get grandfatherly here. I have seven minutes left. What would it take to shut you up when it comes to the Gospel? For most of us, it would take a lot less than being threatened with our lives. What would it take to make you stop doing something? We were having a funny conversation last night. I’m heading to Wyoming tomorrow. I’ve never been elk hunting and I’m going bow hunting in the back country of Wyoming. I’m so excited. I need it and it’s going to be good. It’s going to be good mainly to fellowship with a buddy and the two of us are going by ourselves. Fifteen miles from the trailhead we’re going in on a guy got eaten by a grizzly bear last Friday. So, we are having this debate. Do you play dead or fight back? I’m like, “I am fighting back. I am not going to die while playing dead.” One dude said, “I think the best advice is to play dead. It’ll be good practice for what’s going to happen in two minutes when you really die.” But I think, okay, I’m a little unnerved about it. I’ve got a really good pistol and a big can of bear spray. I know that when I pass people they’re going to think I’m out of my mind because I’m going to have them both in my hand the whole time. But, you know, I’ve been in these mountain my whole life and I’ve had bear encounters. I’ll never forget, me, and Tuck, and Zach on the opening day of archery season. Tuck was eight years old and archery season opens around Tuck’s birthday every year. We were up toward Wayah Bald and we went in on opening day of archery season. We were walking and we had our bows out, and arrows knocked, and we were going to scout this one area, and we came around a corner and there was about a two-hundred-eighty pound sow right in front of us. She was eight feet. We made this crazy noise and she ran off. Spencer Davis and I sat on the tailgate of the truck out here about a month ago and poked fun at a three-hundred-pound boar that was down here in the trash. We were throwing stuff at him, and giggling, and making jokes. I wasn’t scared. What does it take to take it to the next level? For me? Moving from black bear to grizzly bear. Them’s two different animals.

What does it take? There is something in most of our lives that will push our faith to the point that it’s going to start to wobble. Our courage, our stamina, our will to stand firm….something. And I’m not talking about you deal with anxiety, you deal with depression, or you deal with mental illness. I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about that you lose the heart to stand for Jesus. We are cut from a pedigree of disciples who were willing to do whatever it took and take whatever beating, including death, that could be dished out. They weren’t going to be quiet. And for most of us, we don’t even have the tenacity to share Christ with the people we’re closest to. Until we’re a church that prays a lot, and tells people about Jesus a lot, and engages people in our community a lot, we are probably not going to see a lot of people come to faith in Jesus. Their obedience is bold. What’s it take to shut them up? What’s it take for these guys? You’ve got to kill them. The only way you are going to make them be quiet is to kill them.

Remember when you were growing up and they said that if a snapping turtle bites you that it’s not going to let go until it lightnings? Did you ever hear that? It’s a mountain thing. Everybody from Florida is like, “Uhh..what?” So, they’d say that if a snapping turtle bites you, and it clamps down, it won’t let go until it lightnings. I’m like, “What if you cut its head off?” As a kid, they’d say, “It still won’t let go.” As an adult, I think back—it’s head is this big, I think we can get it loose, you know?

But what about that kind of tenacity where the only way you are going to get me to shut up is to cut my head off? The only way you are going to shut me up is to burn me at the stake. The only way you are going to shut me up is to nail me upside-down to a cross. The only way you are going to shut me up is to lock me in a jail for a decade-plus, like Bunyan, and I’ll just continue to do the work of the Gospel. That’s what our brothers and sisters around the world are doing for the Gospel today.

Richard Wurmbrand’s autobiography literally changed my life. It’s called, *In God’s Underground*. He wrote a lengthier version of it, too. He’s the founder of Voice of the Martyrs. He wrote *Tortured for Christ* and *In God’s Underground.* He tells a story and I think it was fourteen years after being in a Soviet prison in Romania, when one day they let him go. He was so emaciated. They had tried to kill him with starvation. His teeth had rotted out. His bones were literally showing through his skin. Then, they let him out. Now, he was some distance from home so he just starts walking home and he passes a lady on the street. She was a peasant lady and she offered him strawberries. He hasn’t eaten in days and he begins to take the strawberry, but then he says, “No, you know what? I’m going to fast all the way home because when I get home I’m going to have to proclaim the same Gospel that put me there to begin with.” He gets home and after some days, not a long time, his wife calls him to the floor because the state church is preaching a false Gospel. She said, “You need to go down there and wipe this shame from the face of Christ,” and he said, “If I go wipe this shame from the face of Christ, if I go preach this Gospel, you will lose your husband,” and she said, “I do not need a coward for a husband.” That’s what people are doing in the world today for the advance of the Gospel, for the proclamation of the Gospel. Why are they doing it? That’s all we’ve been doing since the beginning. American freedom is like a fraction of a percent of what the Church has experienced in history or that it experiences today. Tertullian, the Early Church historian, said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” The Church grows when it is persecuted. When she is persecuted, she grows.

So, this one brother speaks up and he says, “Look guys, let’s be rational here. If these men are legit, we’re not going to stop this thing.” That was prophetic, wasn’t it? Did the Church grow? Oh, yeah, it grew. And if they’re not legit nothing is going to come from it. So, they are going to let them off ‘easy.’ How did they let them off easy? They beat them until their backs were nothing but raw, exposed flesh. Thirty-nine lacerating blows to their backs. If you grew up with corporal punishment, the closest thing you can come to this was a belt to the behind or a switch to the behind, about five good wallops. Thirty-nine lashes from a grown man, with your back stretched taut, and they got off ‘easy.’

Then, what did they do? Look in verse 41,

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

The disciples were happy to suffer for the name of Jesus. Y’all, this goes beyond boldness. This is supernatural. It’s not normal to rejoice over something like this. It’s not normal; it’s supernatural. It’s Jesus’ promise coming true, when He said, “When you get hauled in to stand in front of these people and be persecuted, I’ll give you the boldness that you need.” The chapter ends with the disciples continuing to preach but, listen, the persecution has firmly begun. It has clearly begun, and it won’t be long until a Christian dies at the hands of these men. The first Christian is going to die in just a few days, and when he dies the Church will grow. Because through his death a man named Paul will hear the Gospel that he will one day submit to and he will become the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Because persecution doesn’t stop the Church, it accelerates it.

Let’s do our part in a place we have freedom. Let’s be bold with the Gospel, and let’s tell people about Jesus, and let’s be unashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray.

Lord, I pray that tonight that we would be, as this is a message for the Church, no doubt, for the Church, I pray that we would be bold in our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God, I pray that we would be unwilling to be silenced, unwilling to bow down to the demands of people. We do live in a society that would like for us to be quiet. We do live in a society that wants to regulate, and mandate, and legislate Jesus out of everything, but we should expect that because we are a secular society. There is no such thing in this world as a Christian government, a Christian society. We live in a fallen world and so we want to be a light in a dark place. And, God, even though the light that we have the opportunity to share in our culture is going to shine differently than it does in China, or North Korea, I pray that we would nonetheless shine brightly, as the darkness we are trying to penetrate is a darkness of social persecution, cultural persecution. Help us to be bold in the tradition of the faith of our fathers and those who have gone before us, this cloud of witnesses, these men and women who were the early witnesses and martyrs for the faith of Jesus. Help us to be encouraged by it to serve well. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

1. <https://rzim.org/let-my-people-think-broadcasts/> (September 17, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)