

Sunday, July 20, 2025 | Filled

Week 16 | Acts 5:12-26 | "Arrested Again, Pt. 1"

READ: Acts 5:12-26 (ESV)

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.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records, Tommy Johns of Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, holds the record for the most arrests in history. Over a thirty-one-year period, between 1957 and 1988, he was arrested nearly *3,000 times*, primarily for being drunk and disorderly in public.

Admittedly, it seems like Mr. Johns was rightfully detained. Australia's finest were doing their duty, providing a much-needed public service. However, not all arrests are warranted.

Sometimes, people are placed behind bars for things they didn't commit. The justice system isn't perfect, and, sadly, many innocent people have had to suffer unlawfully.

But even worse is when, due to a corrupt system, *good* people are imprisoned for doing the *right* thing. If you'll recall, the apostles had already been imprisoned once (Ac. 4:3). In today's passage, they'll be imprisoned another *two times*. Why? What did they do? They preached the gospel. Due to their commitment to Jesus, they became well-acquainted with the local prison. But, as we'll see today, when Christians are detained for the sake of Christ, the Lord can use even jail time to further the good news.

I want you to notice six things:

i. Vs. 12-16 – The Growing Church

Vs. 12 – Luke says, "many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles." Using the miraculous gifts, the apostles continually sought to engage with the people. In the absence of the NT scriptures, these miracles validated the apostolic witness. Today, we do not see such regularity of miracles because the apostles are no longer with us. There is no need to validate the apostolic witness because that task has already occurred. In its place, we have something far better than miracles: the Bible. Through the inerrant and infallible testimony of God's Word, we can know with the utmost certainty that God works wonders.

Remarkably, they didn't do these signs privately or away from the Temple grounds. They posted up in "Solomon's Portico," the same place they preached after healing the lame man (cf. Ac. 3:11). Their prayer for boldness must've paid off (cf. 4:31).

The early church was united under apostolic authority. It was through the ministry of the apostles that people were being healed. They were the nucleus around which the early church gathered.

Vs. 13-14 – Luke seems to say two contradictory statements here. Were people keeping their distance? Or, were they becoming believers? The answer is yes and yes. Both are true.

On the one hand, there were people who "held [the apostles] in high esteem" yet refused to openly "join them." This is not a new problem. Nicodemus came to Jesus under cover of darkness likely because he feared being associated with Jesus (cf. Jn. 3:2). John says "many even of the [Jewish] authorities believed in [Jesus], but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that

comes from God” (Jn. 12:42-43). Joseph of Arimathea, the man who offered his family tomb for Jesus’ burial, was himself a disciple of Jesus. Yet, no one knew it before that moment because he feared the Jews (cf. Jn. 19:38). Given the hostility of the Jewish government toward Christians already present at this time and the recent deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, some of the people’s hesitancy to openly associate with the apostles isn’t hard to believe.

The early church was intimidating but admired. The bar to join a church is so low today that people have lost all respect for the church. This was not the case in the first century. While the church was appealing to everyone, not everyone joined because they knew that doing so meant something. It meant giving up their former life. It meant devoting themselves to the ways of Christ and the teachings of the church. It meant possibly suffering persecution.

However, this reaction wasn’t the norm but the exception. Not everyone kept their distance. Luke says that while some were secret admirers of Christianity, the vast majority were openly becoming believers. The church, “more than ever,” had become a vast “multitude of both men and women.”

The early church was evangelistic and egalitarian. Although the church met the needs of people, it did so to reach them with the gospel; it was not, strictly speaking, a purely humanitarian organization. Its primary function was to make disciples. And discipleship wasn’t exclusive to men or women. Both sexes were encouraged to follow Jesus.

Vs. 15-16 – As with Jesus, the apostles drew a crowd wherever they went. One of the main draws was the miraculous healings. People were in such dire need that if they could not get close, they’d carry their “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.” Although Luke does not explicitly state that this tactic was successful, we have good reason to believe it was effective given the context. Later, Paul will heal over vast distances, using handkerchiefs (cf. Ac. 19:12).

Those who came to be healed were not only residents of Jerusalem, but also came from the towns around the capital. The gospel movement was quickly spreading. It didn’t matter whether someone was “sick” or “afflicted with unclean spirits”; if they were brought to the apostles, “they were all healed.”

The early church was a place of recovery.

READ: Luke 5:29-32 (ESV)

²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes **grumbled** at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹ And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Though God can and does heal regularly, the church isn't an actual hospital. But it is a place where people can find spiritual healing through repentance. Through the church, lives can be changed, marriages can be saved, and people can be made whole, even though they may yet suffer from some debilitating disease.

ii. Vs. 17-21a – The Teaching Church

Vs. 17-18 – Most people loved the apostles, but there was a very potent and very powerful minority who weren't as thrilled as the masses. Luke says, “the high priest [aka Caiaphas]” got his cronies together, aka “the party of the Sadducees” and “rose up” against the apostles. They “**arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison**.” When Luke says “public prison,” he means the religious leaders **imprisoned them publicly**, or for all to see.¹ This was a clear demonstration of force for both the apostles and the general populace. The Sanhedrin sought to demonstrate **its authority. They were the ones in charge, and they wanted everyone to know it.**

What was the motivation for imprisoning the apostles this time? Were they motivated by some desire to defend God? No. Were religious leaders upset that, despite their direct orders, the apostles were still preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus? That may have been part of it. But the reason we're given is that they were “filled with **jealousy**.”

Pretenders envy the genuine article. Start living for the Lord, and while you may or may not upset unbelievers, you will always upset those who are only pretending to be Christians. Few are more antagonistic to Christians than fake ones.

Vs 19-21a – Remarkably, the apostles didn't stay very long in prison. Luke tells us, “During the night **an angel** of the Lord [not *the* angel of the Lord (cf. Ex. 3:2-7; 14:19; Num. 22:22-23)] **opened the prison doors and brought them out**.” The Sanhedrin wanted the apostles incarcerated, but God wanted them free. **Divine sovereignty trumps earthly authority every time.** Interestingly, the Lord makes it a habit of opening prison doors throughout the book of

¹ Peterson, David G., *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), p. 218.

Acts (cf. 12:6-11; 16:26-30). **Once is by chance. Twice is a coincidence. Three times is a pattern.** Though, to be clear, not every believer is rescued from imprisonment or, even, death (cf. Ac. 7:57-60; 12:1-2; 21:30-36).

However, this was freedom **with a purpose**. After freeing the apostles, the heavenly messenger gave them three commands: “Go,” “stand in the temple,” and “speak to the people all the words of this Life.” In other words, they were instructed to return to the **same place** where they were arrested and were told to deliver the **same message** that had led to their arrest. **They were not freed to escape; they were freed to proclaim.** And ever quick to obey, Luke says, “And when they heard this, they entered the temple **at daybreak** and began to teach.” They were eager to preach the gospel even if it meant being imprisoned again.

The early church was committed to **teaching** “the words of this Life.” Why? They make the dead come alive! Believers loved doctrine and took every chance they could get to spread the teachings of the New Testament.

READ: John 6:66-69 (ESV)

⁶⁶ After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

iii. Vs. 21b-26 – The Perplexing Church

Vs. 21b-24 – Remarkably, while the apostles were preaching in the temple, “the high priest...called together the council.” They needed to convene a hearing to decide the fate of the apostles. This was no small-time hearing either. Luke says, “all the senate of the people of Israel” were in attendance. This is starting to sound similar to the last time.

Once settled, the Sanhedrin “sent to the prison to have [the apostles] brought” to stand trial. Much to their surprise, when “the officers” arrived at the prison, they did not find the apostles. They “returned and reported” their discovery to the Sanhedrin. Remarkably, they said they found “the prison **securely locked** and the guards standing at the doors.” Yet, despite this fortification, when they “opened” the cell doors, they “found no one inside.” Luke says this discovery “**greatly perplexed**” everyone from “the captain of the temple” to “the chief priests.” They could not fathom what had occurred. They were left “wondering what this would come to”. **This was quite the puzzling predicament. They’d never had to deal with a situation like this before.**

Vs. 25-26 – While they were discussing the mysterious disappearance of the apostles, “someone came and told them, 'Look!' The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” No doubt they thought the apostles had high-tailed it out of there. Instead, they returned to the same spot, preaching the same message.

Take the opportunity while they had, “the captain with the officers went and brought them.” This time, they did so without “force.” Why? Were they afraid? Were they starting to come around on the message? No and no. Their more balanced approach was because “they were afraid of being stoned by the people.” The same thing happened with Jesus. The religious leaders wanted to take the Lord by force, “but they feared the crowds” (Matt. 21:46).

The early church was **Christ-like**, not **warlike**.

READ: James 3:13-18 (ESV)

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Video Description:

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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