

Acts: *The Spirit, the Church and the Spread of God's Word*

The Pressure of Persecution

Acts 5:14-42

Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney, July 14, 2019

I. God is Still Doing What God Has Been Doing Since Jesus Rose from the Dead!

Acts 5:14 “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.”

Matthew 16:18 “... I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Revelation 7:9-10 “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”

Despite increased hostility and persecution, the message of the Gospel continues to spread at a breathtaking rate all over the world!

II. Unbelievers Are Still Doing What They've Always Been Doing

A. They're Filled with Suspicion and Fear of Losing Control

Acts 5:17 “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation”

The hostility and persecution against Christianity is driven much more by emotion than intellect and reasoning. People deny God because they don't want there to be a God.

B. They Use Their Authority to Threaten and Intimidate Believers into Silence

Acts 5:28 “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?...”

C. They Refuse to Acknowledge the Supernatural Basis and Power and Christianity

Acts 5:28 “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!”

D. They're Convicted and Offended by the Message of the Gospel

Acts 5:33 "When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them."

E. They're Convinced that Christianity Is on the Verge of Dying Out

Many people over time have predicted the end of Christianity – but it is alive and well today because Jesus is alive and is still drawing people to Himself all over the world!

III. So What Should We as Believers Be Doing Today?

A. You Should Have the Courage to Stand Because Your Conscience is Bound to a Higher Authority

Acts 5:29 "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"

"I stand convinced by the Scriptures to which I have appealed. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. To go against conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. I cannot and will not recant anything. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

-Martin Luther

Courage is not a lack of fear. Rather, it is to act, by the power of the Holy Spirit, on an urgent conviction in the face of some threat - *despite* anxious or fearful feelings.

B. You Should Have the Confidence to Speak Up Because the Message of the Gospel is Still the Solution to Our Biggest Problem

Acts 5:30-31 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

C. You Should Have a Heart that's Willing to Sacrifice to See More People Come to Christ

Acts 5:41-42 "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

A church that is filled with the Holy Spirit and focused on what matters most – reaching more people for Christ – is a very joyful church... despite any amount of persecution.