

## **Acts Chapter 5: 12 - 42**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It was like the days of Jesus in Galilee all over again; so many were being healed by the apostles. No wonder the Jewish authorities grew jealous of their enormous influence.

Against this background of increasing opposition, its also important to notice the need to have an appropriate fear (reverence) of the risen Christ.

Fear of the risen Christ is also part of the incident of Ananias & Sapphira. Their punishment for treating the church with contempt reflects the value with which the risen Christ holds his Church. Christ takes it very personally when his church is mistreated (see also Acts 9:4 for this close personal link between Jesus and his church). The thought of ignoring or refusing Christ or seeking to manipulate him, should fill us with dread. If it doesn't then we have no idea who we're dealing with. (Read Luke 12:4-5).

### **Questions for discussions**

- So far we have seen the work of the risen Christ opposed because of theological reasons (4:2), as well as crass jealousy (5:17). In your experience, what are other reasons that Christianity is criticized and opposed?
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- As an apostle, how would you feel during the events of verses 18-21. What would you expect to happen next?
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- a) Of what do they accuse the apostles in 5:28?

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- b) How is this different for what bothered them in 4:2?

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- “We must obey God rather than men”. (5:29) When do you find this especially hard? What are some specific, practical ways we can help each other in this matter?

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- How should a reverent fear of the risen Christ influence:

- ◆ how we handle temptation?

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- ◆ the way we treat other Christians?

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- ◆ our attitude to church?

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- ◆ our prayer & bible reading?

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- ◆ facing persecution?

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- ◆ our evangelism?

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- Prior to Jesus, there were many Jewish zealots who led rebellions against Rome. What is Gamaliel's point in recalling two such leaders? Do you think he might be one of the secret believers mentioned in John 12: 42? Or a political opportunist not wanting to arouse the public? Why? How do you think Peter's statement in verse 29 (and 4:19) may have influenced Gamaliel?

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- Flogging sometimes resulted in death. How would you react if you were freed from jail, only to experience a more severe punishment? What does the response of the apostles show about them (vv41-42)?

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**CONCLUSION**

Iranian Christian leader Mehdi Dibaj spent nine years in prison for his faith and was murdered in 1994, six months after his release from prison. One of his prison guards once asked him, "Does Jesus Christ know that He has someone in this prison who loves Him?" He replied,

“Jesus Christ our Lord has millions of people who love Him and who wish to sacrifice their lives for Him. I too wish I was one of them.” After relating this, Dibaj wrote, “How sweet it will be if one day my life is sacrificed for him.”

Such attitudes are not natural to us. Usually when we are ridiculed in public or punished for the gospel, we get angry and resentful—in part, perhaps, because we think that we should look victorious in public. It is clear that there were long periods when biblical heroes looked anything but victorious. But they were propelled by the vision of God’s ultimate victory and the belief that their temporary defeats were contributing to winning a great victory for the kingdom. These are important attitudes we must develop in relation to the gospel, especially as they are difficult to sustain in a culture that is so committed to the need to look good in public.

These attitudes did not come naturally to the apostles either. Calvin says, “It must not be thought that the apostles were so stolid as not to feel ashamed and even to suffer from a sense that they had been wronged; for they had not discarded nature completely. But when they thought over the cause, joy got the upper hand.” Calvin agrees that most of us do not think in this way: “Hardly one in a hundred understands that the ignominy of Christ is superior to all the triumphs of the world.” Thus he says, “For that reason we must think about this sentence more earnestly.” The question we must constantly ask ourselves is, “How important to us is the gospel of Christ and honor of his name?”