



Sermon Series Notes

“Callousness, Courage, & Counted Worthy to Suffer” (Acts 5:12-42)

Danny Hodges - NT3625

vv.13-14 These verses appear on the surface to be contradictory. I like what one commentator said: “So vivid was the sense of God’s presence and power that men did not lightly associate with them or make glib professions of faith” (Believers Bible Commentary, p.414). Especially after the deaths of Ananias & Sapphira, those who became believers and joined this church were very serious about their commitment to Christ.

vv.15-16 While God is still in the business of miracles and healing, this was a unique time for these kinds of things in the history of the church. See Heb.2:3-4.

v.17 Envious and contentious rivalry.

vv.18-24 Obviously the angel got them out without any of the guards noticing. You say, how could that happen? Answer: “He’s God!” Note in Acts 12 Peter will be delivered from prison a second time by an angel.

vv.25-26 What respect these church leaders had among the people!

vv.27-32 This was courageous, and cutting. But unlike those on the day of Pentecost who were “cut to the heart,” repented, and put their faith in Christ, these Jewish leaders are filled with fury.

v.33 The same hatred they had toward Jesus they now have toward His disciples. John 15:18 If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

vv.34-39 Gamaliel was recognized as the greatest teacher of his day. He was the grandson of Rabbi Hillel, for whom an entire school of thought was named within Pharisaism. He was the spiritual father of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:3). So his opinion and advice here has clout.

The unstoppable nature of the gospel and the Word of God (II Tim.2:9)

v.40 The flogging was based on Deut.25:1-4, where the maximum number of lashes was 40. In order to make sure they did not violate this law, the Jews made the maximum 40 minus 1, or 39, just in case someone miscounted.

v.41 See I Peter 4:12-16

v.42

There are three things I’d like to call our attention to in the text. First, the callousness of the Jewish leaders. Second, the courage of the apostles. And third, the apostles being counted worthy to suffer for the Name, and how they responded to that privilege.

THE CALLOUSNESS OF THE LEADERS

Callous: A toughened area of skin that has become thick and hard.

How does someone become so calloused?

- Rejecting obvious truth
 - They rejected the miracles Jesus performed (John 2:23; 3:1-2; 7:31; 12:37; Matt.11:21-23).
 - They rejected the resurrection (Matt.28:11-13)

- They ignored the fulfilled prophecies about Jesus (Law of Compound Probabilities & only 8 fulfilled prophecies).
- Resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51; 28:23-27)
- Remaining stubborn over time

Stubborn: Having or showing dogged determination not to change one's attitude or position on something, especially in spite of good arguments or reasons to do so.

Obstinate: Stubbornly refusing to change one's opinion or chosen course of action, despite attempts to persuade one to do so.

Stiff-necked: Haughty and stubborn.

See Ex.32:9 "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people.

See Ex.33:2-3; Deut.9:6 Understand then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people; 9:13...they are a stiff-necked people indeed!; Jer.9:14...they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts...; 11:8...they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts; 13:10...refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts...; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17; Ezekiel 2:4 The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn; Hosea 4:16 The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer; See Mark 3:1-6.

See Psalm 81:11-12 (context); Rom.1:18-28; 2:5

THE COURAGE OF THE APOSTLES

- What changed them from cowering behind closed and locked doors after the cross was Jesus' resurrection. Now assured that Jesus was alive, they could face death with completely confidence in a risen Savior.
- Peter is the main leader of the apostles, & he would ultimately go on to die for the Name (John 21). Peter had once been confident in his commitment to Christ, claiming that even if all the other apostles failed, he would not. Jesus of course told Peter the truth, that in just a short time from his bold profession he would three times deny that he even knew Christ. He would repent of this failure with many tears, and he would become the leader we see in the early pages of the book of Acts. But Peter would later on have a lapse in courage, & that before a surprising crowd (see Gal.2:11-16; Acts 11:1-3). Isn't it amazing that Peter could stand before the Sanhedrin and boldly profess the truth about Jesus Christ, then years later cower before fellow believers who would criticize him if he stood against a legalistic misrepresentation of the gospel.
- Elijah stood alone against 850 false prophets, then ran when one woman threatened him.
- How's your current state of courage for Christ? It doesn't matter how courageous you've been in the past, or what the circumstances of that courage was. Are you being courageous for Christ now? See Heb.10:32-39.
- I cannot relate to standing before a supreme court that demands I stop confessing proclaiming the truth of the gospel. I pray I never have to. And in my experience as a Christian, I can only remember a few times when I faced serious persecution: Playing drums for Anita Bryant in Champagne, Ill., gays surrounding the building; Receiving bomb threats years ago because of our stand on abortion; Being spit on by a witch; Channel 10 News doing a very biased story on our church when we stopped our Boy Scouts program. I have never been flogged for my faith, or my life threatened for my proclamation of the death, burial & resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But with that said, I know how difficult it can be to keep up your courage for Christ, no matter what the circumstance. And sometimes it's been easier to be bold for Christ when facing more serious opposition than when the threat is simply ridicule, or lack of acceptance in personal relationships. I'll never forget how hard it was for me when I was taking an evening class on marine mechanics at Dixie Hollins High School years ago. One evening as the whole class of about 12 was gathered together just socializing, one of them asked me what I did for a living. When I said I was a pastor, the whole mood changed dramatically, and little by little they all excused themselves and began piddling with whatever engine project they were working on. And it was painfully obvious every class after that one how they would try to avoid me as much as they could. I can only imagine what it must be like for a Christian in a family of non-Christians. That must take tremendous courage.

THE APOSTLES RESPONSE TO BEING COUNTED WORTHY OF SUFFERING FOR THE NAME.

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.

Biblical reasons to rejoice when we suffer for Christ:

- Proves the genuineness of our faith (I Peter 1:6-7; II Tim.3:12)
- Willingness to suffer keeps us from a lukewarm lifestyle (being "wishy washy"). See I Peter 4:1-2.
- Enduring suffering encourages others (Phil.1:14)
- Means of fellowship with Christ (Phillipians 3:10-11)

See Matt.5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23

CONCLUSION

Are you rejecting obvious truth? Are you resisting the Holy Spirit? If you remain stubborn in time you will become calloused. I pray you don't do that. Why not humble yourself and submit to the Lord today?

How's your courage for Christ?

Are you suffering for Christ? Rejoice, because there are plenty of reasons to do so.