

Acts 5: 17-32

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Let's have a word of prayer. "Father in Heaven, these dear people that have gathered here today could be a million other places, but they've chosen to come to church. Lord You have written in Your word that You will honor those who seek to honor You. They are here Lord, seeking to honor You. And I am asking on their behalf that You would honor them beyond what they dreamed or expected today. I am asking Heavenly Father for You now to send angels to fill this auditorium with an atmosphere of heaven. I pray that they would fight back the demonic spirits that would want to distract us and take our minds away from You. Lord I pray that You will send Your Holy Spirit and that He would speak to each heart to teach us today. We pray in His name, Amen."

Back in yesteryear when men used to sail the ocean, they learned some tricks about sailing. I was reading about it this week and I found it rather fascinating. I don't know much about sailing. I've only been in one of these little, little sun-fish things and that was just pattering around the shore one day, don't know anything about sailing. But I understand that you are able to go forward even if the wind is blowing right in your face. You tack, you go 45 degrees one way, 45 degrees another way, and you can make it to where you are wanting to go. And these ancient mariners, they had their ships and they went around the world on those ships. They could deal with the wind. They knew how to deal with the wind.

Now the way that our globe is, is that in the northern hemisphere the trade winds blow north-easterly. In the southern hemisphere the trade winds blow south-westerly so they are blowing in opposite directions. And right around the equator where the division takes place is an area that the sailors called the doldrums. In the doldrums that was the place where the wind didn't blow normally. It was quiet, it was calm, sometimes there will be violent storms there, but usually it was a problem for the sailors because there was no wind at all. No wind, no progress. They would get stuck in the doldrums. And sometimes it was life threatening because they would be running out of fresh water. They would be running out of food, and they had to get out of doldrums. And so one of the methods they would use is they would take one or two of the life boats and set them out and tight them to the ship and have the men row as hard as they could, trying to row the sail boat through the doldrums.

Well I did a little research about doldrums, and in English we have used that idea and applied it to this. It is a spell of listlessness of despondency. It is a state of inactivity, stagnation or being in a slump. The doldrums! Have you ever been in the doldrums before? What about spiritually? Listlessness, despondency, inactivity, stagnation or a slump; I'd like to study that with you today. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 5. We are continuing our series in the Book of Acts. The last time we were together we studied about the supernatural phenomenon associated with the teaching of the apostles. How people were being healed and there were so many exciting things taking place that the message of the Gospel was being proclaimed throughout Jerusalem. And people were bringing their friends into Jerusalem so they might be healed by the apostles.

Our study today is in verses 17-32. Acts 5 verses 17-32. In verse 17 it says: "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, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, “Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!”

Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, “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!” But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. 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. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

Wow, what a story! All these things taking place, and the apostles are there teaching, and they are arrested and put in jail. Let’s look at verse 17. It says, “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.” Now the word, “indignation” is translated as jealousy in the New International Version. It’s jealousy, indignation and rage in the Amplified Version. And if you take that and go down to the root of the word that is used in the Greek, it has the meaning of being hot, burning, zeal, intense, passionate. These haters of the apostles were filled with hot, burning, zeal. They were intense and they were passionate in their hatred. That’s the negative side of the word.

The positive side of the word is somebody who feels that way but they want to protect them. Now in their attitude, we discover in verse 33 what these priests had in mind. In verse 33 it says, “When they heard these things, they were furious and plotted to kill them.” They wanted to kill these apostles. They were so angry at them. So their design was death.

Now I want to share something with you. That’s the negative side of being jealous or having zeal. The positive side is described by God that He is jealous over us; He has a zeal for us. Do you realize that this is an expression of the emotion of God and how He feels about the individuals? God is hot, He is burning, He is zealous, He is intense, and He is passionate that you would understand He wants to give you life. Now when I preach that it’s easy to say “You know God loves us all!” But I want you to personalize that. God, who ever you are, God is passionate about your salvation. He is passionate about your life. He is hot inside that you would have eternal life. He intensely wants you to spend eternity with Him. You, just you, that’s who He cares about today.

Well, these men were furious with the apostles and they sought to kill them. Look at verse 18 chapter 5 it says, “They laid hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.” Now I’ve read that story many times and I am sure you have too. And I immediately remembered the last time that was an arrest, it was Peter and John. So I just assumed Peter and John were arrested. There you have couple apostles, that’s plural, that makes it. But yet, when you go to verse 29 it says, “Peter and the other apostles answered and said ...” So there’s got to be at least 3 of the apostles arrested. And in reality as I began to look at this, a number of people who are experts about these things, they said it is very likely that all 12 of the apostles were arrested. This was a hunt. This was an opportunity as far as the priests were concerned, to wipe out the affect of the apostles and to consequently wipe out Christianity. This is the devil’s attempt to get rid of the leadership of Christianity.

It really reminds me of the story of Jesus being in the boat with his 12 apostles, and they head out and He is so tired, He is asleep in the back. And Satan sends the storm, he is trying to sink the boat, there was no way that boat was ever going down. That was the Christian church in that boat. It was Christ and his apostles. That boat was not going down, and I’ve got good news today too brothers and sisters, though every demon in hell may try to sink this ship, it’s not going down. All 12 of them are arrested and God turns it into a humorous experience actually.

Look what happens in verse 19. Verse 19 it says, “But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out...” Now the reason I say this is humorous, if you look at chapter 23 verse 8. Acts 23 verse 8 it outlines a couple of things that the Pharisees believe or actually don’t believe. In 23 verse 8 it says, “For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection-and no angel or spirit...” So they don’t believe in angels. What does God do? He sends an angel. And the story is just amazing. You have these 12 apostles, the leaders of the church sitting in jail, and sometime during the night an angel comes along, takes them out. The guards are still there in the morning. They don’t know they are not there. And when the priests and all their pride and pomposity meet together to have their trial, “Go bring the prisoners to us,” they are not there.

Where are they? We don’t know. While they are looking at each other wondering what’s going to happen somebody comes running in out of breath. “Hey, hey, all those guys you arrested last night, they are at the temple teaching again.” That’s amazing story. It’s an amazing picture. Now in Acts 5 verse 19 it says, “The angel of the Lord opened the prison doors...” Do you know that is a reoccurring theme in scriptures? Look at Luke chapter 4 please. Luke chapter 4 is the story of Jesus going to church. He hadn’t been long in the ministry, and He went back to visit the home folk back in His home congregation in Nazareth. In Luke 4 verse 16 it says, “Jesus came to Nazareth where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And Jesus was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

There, right in the heart of the gospel is deliverance to those who are captive. And these men are living that experience out. God sends an angel and delivers those that are captive.

Now, prison doors opened, the gospel brothers and sisters, listen to this: the gospel opens prison doors! This morning you may be trapped in fear. You may be incarcerated in habits; you may be behind the bars of thoughts that are locking you in. I have good news for you. If you have a big problem, you have a small God. Because if you have a big God, you got a small problem and He can deliver you and set the captives free today. This day, God wants to deliver you from behind the bars that you might be locked in. The gospel is a delivering ministry from God.

In Acts 5, let's turn back there please. Acts 5 verse 20 the angel has instruction for the 12 as they are released. Acts 5 verse 20 the angel says, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." So you've been delivered, now go share the words of life. We have a hymn that we like to sing. "Sing them over again to me, wonderful..." what? "...words of life!" Words of life! That's what they were to share, the words of this life. Verse 21, "And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together..."

Now picture this. Here we are, we are one of the 12. We are down there, we are preaching away and things are going on, and we are arrested and we are told, "Don't you ever preach in the name of Jesus again." And we are put in prison. And at night we are set free. And the angel says, "Now, go back to the spot where you were arrested and do the same thing again." Do you realize brothers and sisters the fact that they did that, is one of the single greatest evidences that Jesus and His death, burial and resurrection are true. Because some individuals are not going to threaten their life to perpetuate a lie! They would say, "Ha, that's enough, it's not the gigs up, it's not working, we are out of here!" No, they went right back to that spot. Why? Because they knew Jesus was alive. And they knew He was real. And for them, serving God was everything. So there they go back to the temple to teach.

And it just cries out, this question cries out: "What kind of men are these guys? What kinds of men do that?" They've been arrested. Arrested so they could be killed, they are delivered and the angel says, "Go back to where you were arrested and do the same thing again." What kinds of men are these? And then it begs another question, "How do they get that way?" How do you get to be that kind of person?

Well let's look at Acts 2. Acts chapter 2 beginning with verse 1, it says, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come; they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them." These people were on fire for God. They are on fire for God. They had zeal, they had a desire, they had intensity, they had a passion, they had a burning. They would not be still, they would not be quiet, they were on fire. It's like Wesley. It was said of Wesley when he was asked about his preaching, he said "I just ask God to put me on fire and people come to watch me burn." He was on fire for the Lord.

Do you realize that the word indignation and jealousy and zeal that we talked about in the negative, how its root is hot, burning, zeal, intense, passionate in the negative. Then on the positive we have God felling the same way only it's not hatred, it's love. Do you realize that when God sent a message to the last day church, the church of Laodicea, He said: "Look, I wish

you were hot; I wish you were hot. Man, I wish you had a passion for Me.” That’s what God is saying. “I wish you had a passion for Me. I wish you were intense, I wish you were on fire! Or, I wish you were ice cold.”

But this mediocrity, where you think you got enough, and so you know, and you’re just kind of hanging out, and nothing is happening. God says, “That makes me sick. I am going to vomit.” Do you know what He says? Be zealous and repent. Same root word; get hot, get indignant about sin and turn to Me.” That’s what He is saying. God wants of us to become people who are on fire, on fire for the Lord. But how? How does one become hot? How does one become burning? How does one become filled with the zeal? Look at Acts chapter 4. Acts chapter 4 where Peter and John were standing before the Sanhedrin council at the last arrest. We are looking at the verse 13, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled.” Why? It says, “...they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

Wow! Let me ask you something. Has anybody said to you lately, “Ha, you’ve been with Jesus again, haven’t you? I can tell, I can tell.” But I want you to know something brothers and sisters, miracles take place at the feet of Jesus. And if you are a husband needing patience, needing kindness, and needing to ask for forgiveness for your inattention to your wife or your children, spend time with Jesus, He’ll change you. And your family will say, “Daddy has been with Jesus.” And if you are a wife and you got problems, whatever they are, spend time with Jesus. And your children and your husband will say, “Mommy has been with Jesus.” These men had been with Jesus and their lives were changed.

In fact, I want to show you what happens when you hang out with Jesus. Look at Luke chapter 24. Jesus had died, He had been buried, He had been resurrected, and He is about ready to go back to heaven. He had been visiting with them over a 40 day period, and on this day, the way Luke describes it, He went to heaven. And we have it in Luke 24 verse 45. This is what happens when you hang out with Jesus, verse 45 it says, “And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Jesus will teach you about God. Jesus will teach you about life, Jesus will teach you about yourself. He does it through His word. That’s how you begin the process of hanging out with Jesus, right here. It’s the Bible.

And you know brothers and sisters, if there could be one message that I can repeat over and over, it would be: “Get in the word, and the word will get in you, and your life will be changed. Your life will be changed.”

Well the story goes on. You go down to verse 50 and 53, at least down in my Bible; it may be across in yours. In verse 50 it says, “And Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.” “...continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”

You see it went this way. They were with Jesus, He taught them the Scriptures and they couldn’t stop praising God, couldn’t be quiet. That’s being on fire, that’s having a zeal, that’s being the

type of people God wants us to be. In fact, those types of people are among us. And there are many like that around the world.

How can we become that way? I want to show you a couple of things first and then I am going to answer this question. Look at Matthew 24. Matthew 24, that's the chapter that we say now, "Here are the signs of Jesus' return. When you see all these things happening, Jesus' return is soon." But if you study it carefully, you'll realize that all the earthquakes, and all the famines, and the pestilences and one nation rising against another, all that type of stuff, Jesus says, none of that is a sign to His soon return. All that is going to take place, but the end is not yet. There is only one sign that matters. It's found in verse 14. Jesus says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world, as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." The last sign, and really the only sign is the gospel being preached to the world.

Now I ask you. Last week, our guest speaker, general conference employee told us that around the world there are 20 million of us. Praise God, praise God, 20 million of us. But line that up against 6 plus billion people, and let me ask you: "Do you think the gospel is being preached to the world? It seems like, you know, we better plan for retirement. We are going to be here for a while. Now how many of you believe, the only people who can preach the gospel belong to our denomination? You don't believe that, do you? In fact, I'll tell you, Jesus said "If nobody will preach it, the rocks will cry out." God is not limited by our smallness. And I want to share with you that the wind is blowing.

There is a magazine I'd like to read; I like to read it over at the library, it's called, "Preaching." I like to preach. I like to preach well, strive to, and so I am always and forever looking for better ways to improve. And the whole magazine is dedicated to preaching, and one was called, "Evangelistic Preaching." "Aha, I like that!" So I decided I am going to read that magazine. They had an interview with the gentleman named, Steve Douglas. Now you may or may not have ever heard of Steve Douglas, but as I explain who he is, you'll recognize a little bit about him. He is an MIT graduate, and he has an MBA from Harvard. Steve has served "Campus Crusade for Christ" for 30 yrs up until 2001 when he became president of "Campus Crusade for Christ." So you know "Campus Crusade for Christ," right; the 4 spiritual laws, fantastic way to lead people to Christ. He was asked this question by one of the editors of preaching magazine: "Why is it important to do evangelism now?"

He identifies 2 reasons. One, he said, "God is moving in unusual ways," and then 2, "With technology, we have an opportunity to do things we never could do before." And I want to read to you a couple of things he says, "I think we have concrete evidence that God is stepping things up in recent days. One example is just the existence of the "Jesus" film. Here is a film that has been translated into 933 different languages. That's never occurred in history. The most translated film other than that might be less than a 150. And here we have a film that's been shown in every single country on earth and has seen 6 billion exposures to the Gospel, 200 million decisions for Christ. Now Ralf Weiner, the former director of the US Center of World Missions calls it "The most effective evangelistic tool of all history.""

200 million people accepted Jesus Christ because of a film. While you and I were struggling to get here on time today, God was winning souls around the world. He goes on to say and I quote, "The second evidence that God is moving is that He is doing some rather unusual things in certain parts of the world. For example, in the Middle East we are seeing dreams. God is actually causing people to see dreams of Jesus Christ. In one particular part of Northern Africa people there tell us that half the decisions they encounter are a direct result of or involve a dream about Jesus."

In the last days, what does it say? People are going to dream what? They are going to dream dreams. He goes on to tell a story of a woman in Iran. "There was a woman in Iran watching the Jesus film on set 7." I assume that's a satellite connection? Somebody can correct me afterwards if it's not. "She had all the doors shut. Of course because it's Iran, and in the end she got a little confused on the close..." it goes on to say, "...when Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." She thought it was the door of her room, not the door of her heart. So she got up and opened one of the doors there to the room. Flooding her room with light, blinding light that drove her to the floor; when she regained her sight, she saw Jesus in the center and He was saying, "Well, will you invite me in?" And she accepted Christ."

What about India? In 2001, 2% of the people that lived in India were Christians. Just 4 years later, 7%; 5% increase. And that might not sound like much until you realize there are billion people that live in India. 150 new believers in a 4 year time period, 150 million new believers in a 4 year time period. You talk about China, when the communist took over, there were a million Christians, and now there are over 150 million Christians, most of them meeting in home-churches.

But listen to this: "These are the starchy variety of Christians who say each morning as they leave their home, "Today I prepare to die for Jesus." That's solves a lot of issues once you've settled that. 150 million people, do you know what the Christians are doing in China? They have developed a program, it's called, "Back to Jerusalem." And they have 100 thousand missionaries that are going to start working their way west. And I've got to read the countries they are going to be going to. 100 thousand missionaries to Kurdistan, Turkistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, all the "stan's" they are going to go there. They are working their way west; back to Jerusalem, why? Because it was in Jerusalem where the church started, and the church went north, and the church went west, and it's going all the way around the world, and it's coming back home! 100 thousand missionaries, 100 thousand missionaries!

In Africa in 1900 there were 10 million believers. Today there are 360 million born again Christians. Almost 50% of the continent of Africa is serving Jesus Christ. And it's from these developing countries that missionaries are coming. In England, the fastest growing church is from an African missionary named, Matthew Ashimolow (sp?). (They love vowels). The largest church in London is a Kenyan bishop named Gilbert Deejay. Do you know there are more Presbyterians in Ghana than there are in Scotland where it started? It's amazing what is happening! Kazakhstan, in 1990 there were 10 believers today they are 10 thousand. There were zero churches and zero pastors, 120 churches and 60 pastors and 3 seminaries. The work brothers and sisters is going like crazy! The wind is blowing!

Josh Claiborne says in 25 years Christianity will grow to 2.6 billion believers around the world. 67% of them are going to live in Africa, Asia or Latin America. I was talking about this with Hall Thompson, our guest speaker last week, assistant to the President of North America. He said they've run statistics too, the general conference of our denomination have run statistics. And they said that by the year 2020, so that's in just about a month or so is going to be 13 yrs. Within 13 years over 60% of the people who belong to our denomination will have belonged to it less than 20 yrs. It's going, the wind, the wing is blowing! People on fire for Jesus Christ are sharing Him and the gospel is going.

You see brothers and sisters, God; God is doing a great work. It's about to wrap up. The question is, "Can we get in on it?" The train is loaded, it's not leaving the station, it's left. But God works it out; we can get on that train if we want. He is doing the great work, the wind is blowing! No one is in the doldrums anymore unless we are individually because God is working miracles all around the world. People are coming to Christ, the gospel is going. The question is, how, how can I get involved? How can I become a person that's on fire, and that God will use?

Please turn quickly to Isaiah chapter 6. We'll not linger here long. This passage preaches its on sermon. Isaiah chapter 6 beginning with verse 1 it says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Now note what happens: "Then one of the seraphim..." he is an angel, "...flew to me, having in his hand a live coal..." That means you could see it moving, it's hot! You want to be hot, here it comes. This angel is coming and he is packing heat. And it says, "He flew to me, and he had in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." It's gone, as deep as the sea is, it's buried. As far as the east is from the west it's gone! You have been declared holy Isaiah. You have been declared righteous Isaiah. It's the gospel message here in the Old Testament. That's what happens when we accept Jesus. We are declared, sin is gone, no longer with us. It's gone!

Now notice what happens: "I also heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah says, "Send me! I've got to preach this; I've got to share it. If I can be made whole, anybody can be made whole!" Brothers and sisters do you want to be on fire for God, let Him touch you! Let Him touch you. I've written it down this way: "With Christ, open word, set free, send me!" That's how it works. "Send me!"

The wind is blowing, sails are full, ships are moving, what about your life? I know for most of us, we think in terms of, "Well, I can't do a grand thing; I'm just an every day person." It's true, we all are, but we serve a big God. Every day, every day that you breathe breath is an opportunity to minister for God. Here is what I mean. Every person you have contact with on any

given day will fall in one of two categories. They'll either be somebody who doesn't know Jesus or they'll be somebody who does know Jesus. Those are the two categories. And every person you come in contact with is somebody you can minister to. If they don't know Jesus then live your life in such a way that you are honest in business. You are fair, you are merciful, you are kind, and you are caring. And pray for that person, and hope that your life will help move that person closer to wanting to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. The Lord may use you to lead that person to Christ. But everybody you come in contact with, if they don't know Jesus, there is somebody to help to move closer to that.

And then, if they know the Lord; we all know it's a struggle. It's a struggle being a Christian! Strengthen their experience, strengthen their hands, encourage them, tell them that it's worth the battle! Don't give up, move forward! So every person we come in contact, we don't need some grand platform to do God's work. Every person we come in contact with is a person to minister to. And it's true, we have a church. And there are many, so many ministries going on in the church. I asked Pastor Kevin to print them out for me, and I went through it, and I said, "That's 20 minutes we don't have to preach about, so much going on." God wants to take an audience and turn us into an army. There are ways to be involved.

And then for a couple of weeks you've been receiving a pamphlet in your bulletin about the "Reach Program." Praying, claiming God's promises, finding our place in His work. We have a fantastic way to teach you how to serve God in a way that will be fun and interesting to you. Brothers and sisters, what I am asking, I am asking for you to spend time with Jesus. Let Him place a fire within your heart. And in January we are going to have an all day meeting. We are going to have worship services in the morning, a fellowship meal in the afternoon, we are going to gather together as the body of Christ, and we are going to seek by His grace to find our place in ministry.

The wind is blowing! Are you in the doldrums or are you headed towards the port, and that port is heaven. If you would like to say to the Lord, "Put me on fire, I want to hangout with Jesus" please stand! "Father in heaven, touch our lips, and send us. We pray in Jesus name, Amen."