

Calm in the Midst of Conflict

Acts 5:17-42

- I love the season that Fletcher is in right now, because he's starting to love heroes and superheroes, and he loves to pretend that he is one
 - It got so bad that at one point he was convinced that he had superpowers because if he crossed his eyes it would give me two heads
 - Literally as I am holding him one day, I look at him and his eyes are crossed looking crazy, and I'm like "What are you doing?!"
 - And he says, "I have superpower, I give dad two heads"
 - And I say "Nooooo buddy you don't do that!" I told him what I was always told growing up, "If you cross your eyes they're gonna get stuck that way! Dad will have two heads forever! Don't do it!"
 - And then he starts to fuss, "But Daahhhhd, it's my superpower!"
- But I love it when he runs around in his Spiderman pajamas, pretending to shoot webs.
- I love when he crawls around pretending to be a member of the Paw Patrol
- My favorite is when goes from curling up in a ball to standing up big, claiming to be a transformer.
 - He wants to be a hero! He wants to be a good guy! He want to save the day!
- We all have seasons where we emulate our heroes.
 - When we're little it's the superheroes we see on our shows and movies

- We get a little bit older and we see other human beings that we want to emulate
- Maybe it's an actor, an athlete, a sibling, a parent
- And as you get older you get to be a little more realistic about who you look up to and who you emulate
 - When I was in middle school, my greatest hero was Tracy McGrady, NBA Superstar that played for the Orlando Magic at the time
 - And for hours after school I was always emulating his free throw routines, his shooting motion, his go-to moves
 - But then as I got older I realized, "You know what, I'm not 100% sure, but I don't think that I am going to be a 6'8" athlete, pulling fade-a-ways over 7 footers and catching dunks off the glass in NBA games
 - So got a little more realistic, and I began to emulate my game after guys like Kyle Korver, JJ Redick, Ray Allen...more spot up shooter type guys who's playing styles were more conducive to my skill set
 - And the way I played and practiced changed because of who I emulated
- In the same way, the way that we live our lives is directly affected by who we emulate.
 - Who we look up to, who we make to be our heroes, will shape the way we carry ourselves. For better or for worse.
- Now, I believe here in this passage that is exactly what we see happening in the lives of the apostles. They are just emulating their Hero.
- In verse 31, Peter says, ***"God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."***
-Acts 5:31 (ESV)

- Now that word “Leader,” is the Greek word Archēgos is also translated Prince, Captain, Author...its the Word the writer of Hebrews used when he referred to Jesus as the Author and Perfecter of our faith
 - But this was the word that the Greeks would use when referring to their Heroes.
 - When they would talk of the heroes of old like Hercules, or the legends of the demi-gods, they would be referred to as their Archēgos—Their champions, their heroes.
- So the biblical writers borrowed this greek term to refer to Jesus as the ultimate Archēgos, the ultimate Champion, the ultimate Hero.
 - And these apostle live their lives based on their Hero that they were trying to emulate.
 - And as we look through this passage, we can’t look at their lives without seeing a reflection of Jesus.
 - Because only a disciple of Jesus Christ, who looks to Him as their Hero, and emulates Him to the best of their ability can be this calm in the midst of conflict.
 - Paul tells us to be imitators of Christ as dearly loved children, and that is exactly what we see the apostles doing.
- ***“But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.” -Acts 5:17-21 (ESV)***
- Now, the apostles are going to be facing the same group that had put Jesus on trial just a few short months ago.

- Caiaphas the high priest at the time, and the Sanhedrin thought that they had squashed this movement whenever they manipulated the process to have Jesus crucified.
 - Little did they know, all they did was light the flame
 - Because three days later Jesus' empty tomb would prove to be a huge problem
 - They would try to pay people off to say that His body was just stolen, but the evidence wasn't really in their favor
 - Then they have over 500 people testifying to seeing Jesus alive after seeing Him publicly executed.
 - Then pentecost comes around, and you have all of these people preaching about Jesus in all kinds of different languages
 - You have Peter and John preaching in the Name of Jesus and thousands and thousands of people are starting to follow them!
- Caiaphas and the Sadducees are the ones that are supposed to be in charge and running things, people are supposed to be bringing them money and seeking their blessing
 - But hundreds of people every day are just bypassing them, paying them no mind, and going to see these Apostles that have pretty much taken over the east wing of the temple courts.
 - And none of them are performing any sacrifices, no one is purchasing any sacrificial animals, they're dropping their tithes at the feet of Peter and John!
 - Everything seems so out of order and the temple is losing money!
- Which is exactly what made them hate Jesus. It was their greed and their jealousy that made them hate Jesus and want to get rid of Him—
 - And they thought that they had but now it's like there's an army of little Jesus' all over Jerusalem

- And they've had enough.. so Caiphus and his gang of Sadducees go and arrest the Apostles. Now was it just Peter and John? I don't know. It very well could have been all 12 of the apostles.
- Now, the party of the Sadducees, was just a portion of the Sanhedrin which pretty much served as a supreme court for the people of Israel
 - So when they arrested the apostles, they put them in a public holding cell until the entire Sanhedrin could convene the next morning
- But during the night, an angel releases them and tells them to go back to the temple and Preach. And I love the way that the angel tells them to do it as well.
 - He says, ***“Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” -Acts 5:20 (ESV)***
 - You see Christianity is not just talk! It is a life!
 - And this Word “Life” is the word Zoé, which means abundant life! By definition it is a *“life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God!”*
- Anyone who ever says that being a Christian is boring, has never really lived out the Christian life!
 - There is nothing more invigorating than the Power of God on full display!
 - This is why James tells us to not just be hearers of the Word but doers also
 - Because if we just hear, and don't do, we'll never experience the real power of this life!
- And in this instance, the apostle were not to just hear the angel, they were to do what the angel said.
 - And what the angel was telling them to do, was to go right back to the place that they got arrested, and keep doing what they got arrested for

- Now, if it were me, I probably would want to strategize a little bit first:
 - *How about we pick a different place to go preach*
 - *How about we take a break for a little while and lay low*
 - *How about we split up so all 12 apostles of us don't get picked off at the same time!*
- They don't do any of that. Verse 21 says when they heard the words of the angel, they went and did what the angel told them to do.
- And here is what I see them emulating from Jesus:
- **LIKE JESUS: THEY RELIED ON POWER FROM HEAVEN TO BE OBEDIENT**
- Jesus too, used angelic intervention to do the will of the Father.
 - Jesus always set the example throughout His whole life and ministry that nothing was going to be done apart from prayer and relying on heavenly power from the Father.
 - And probably the most notable time was when Jesus was in the garden, about to be arrested.
 - And He is praying so intently, and passionately, as He is filled with so much anxiety because of the cross that was before Him— that it literally caused His capillaries around His sweat glands to rupture as He began to perspire blood.
- And He's praying, pleading with the Father saying, ***“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” -Luke 22:42 (ESV)***
 - There was nothing within Jesus' physical body that wanted to go through with the plan
 - To be the ultimate sacrifice and rescue humanity from the condemnation of sin He would have to be whipped within an inch of

His life, His flesh mutilated and torn apart, have thick thorns piercing into His skull, railroad-tie sized nails driven through his wrists and ankles. Just so He could spend the next 6 hours dehydrating and suffocating to death on His own blood.

- He knew that His obedience to the will of the Father would cause Him to go through all of that...so He prays for an alternative plan, but also submits to Himself to be obedient no matter what. And the very next verse says:
 - ***“And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him.” -Luke 22:43 (ESV)***
 - Whenever we are tasked with living out obedience to the will of God, God will always send something to strengthen us to be able to continue to walk in obedience
 - I can tell you from personal experience there are those seasons in ministry where it feels like the walls are closing in on you, you get hit with critical comment after critical comment, you feel like you're not making a difference, everyone and everything is nit picking every little thing that you do...and you just feel defeated and overwhelmed
 - *And just when you're the most discouraged, you'll get the most encouraging message from someone that you wouldn't expect to get that message from*
 - *Or you get a card and a gift anonymously or from someone you know and love that encourages you just at the right time.*
 - *Or you read the exact verse that you need to read the morning you read it*
- God has no shortage of ways that He will encourage you and strengthen you to continue to walk in obedience
- And I know that God has used so many of you like angels from heaven to strengthen me to continue to be obedient, of which I am so thankful

- Because if you try to live a life obedient to the Gospel and the will of God within your own strength and your own power, you won't last a week.
 - We have to rely on the power from Heaven to be obedient
 - Which is exactly what Jesus told these apostles in chapter 1: And you will receive Power from Heaven through the Holy Spirit when He comes upon you. And from that power, you can effectively be His witnesses.
- So heaven intervenes, and enables and empowers the apostles to go back and keep witnessing in the Temple
- And the next morning, the Sanhedrin convenes to figure out what to do about them: ***“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. But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” 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. And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.” -Acts 5: 21b-26 (ESV)***
- I'm reminded of the times that they had attempted to arrest and detain Jesus, but they couldn't because His hour had not yet come.
- My favorite is from Luke chapter 4, when Jesus' teaching makes them so mad that they drove Him out of town, and took Him to an edge of a cliff to throw Him off.

- Jesus let them take Him all the way there, but then when they get to the cliff, it says “But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way. Then He went down to Capernaum...and taught the people.”
- There was nothing that they could do to stop or silence Jesus until He allowed it to happen.
 - And especially on the night He *did* allow Himself to be arrested, the apostles here emulate their hero because:
- **LIKE JESUS: THEY WERE PEACEFUL**
 - They could have riled up the people and stuck it to Caiaphus, the Sanhedrin, and the Temple guards.
 - They could have threatened a riot if they were taken away again.
 - Peter could have probably had someone cutting off someone else’s ear for him this time!
- But instead, the apostles just peacefully went with them.
 - Just like Jesus told Peter to put his sword away in the Garden of Gethsemane
- A few months ago, that’s not how they would have responded.
- When the mob was coming to arrest Jesus Luke says one of the disciples asked, **“Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And He touched his ear and healed him.” -Luke 22: 49-51 (ESV)**
- Then Jesus, Who has always been impossible to take by force, like superman in handcuffs allows Himself to be taken away peacefully.
- So the apostles now emulate the humility of their hero, and go quietly and peacefully with the captain and the guards to appear before the Sanhedrin.

- Verse 27 goes on to say: ***“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” -Acts 5:27-32 (ESV)***

- Here’s another aspect of the peacefulness of Jesus that they emulate:

- LIKE JESUS: THEY WERE PEACEFULLY BLUNT

- Jesus was always lovingly direct whenever He was presenting truth, whether it was when He was on trial, whether when He was telling someone to go and sin no more, whether He was being confronted by belligerent Pharisees, whether when it was Him calling Peter out for having his heart and head in the wrong place.
- If I gave every example of Jesus being peacefully blunt, we would be here all day!

- You know, peaceful does not mean to be passive

- We talked about this a couple of weeks ago
- You can be confident without being critical
- You can be bold without bashing
- You can be peaceful while still bluntly speaking the truth it love
 - You can be blunt with gentleness and respect

- It’s funny, these guys in the Sanhedrin, accuse the apostles...they say, “You are trying to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

- Well, yea! It is on you. If you look in Matthew 27, Pilate is doing everything to get the people to back off of Jesus. He offers to have Him flogged before being released but that wasn't enough for them.
 - He then thinks he can turn the tables on them, as he makes them choose between Barabbas, a known murderer, or Jesus. But they still choose Barrabas to be released.
- And then in verse 24 it says, ***“So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.” And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” -Matthew 27:24-25 (ESV)***
 - So yeaaaa, guys, His blood is on you! You asked for it just a few months ago!
- So Peter just bluntly, yet peacefully, says, *“We answer to God, not to men. We share the same ancestry, and the God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you had Him killed. And God elevated Him as the Archēgos and Savior that will lead Israel to true repentance and forgiveness. We are witnesses to all of this and we have the Holy Spirit who empowers us to witness about Him.”*
- You know, I think that the secret to their peaceful bluntness was right there in the beginning of his response.
- He says, *“We must obey God rather than men.”*
 - Or we don't answer to you, we answer to God
 - And that in lies the reason, I believe, too many people are so afraid to be peacefully blunt with the truth, because too many of us think we answer to man, before we answer to God.
 - We don't fear standing accountable before the Throne Room of heaven for our reluctance to share eternity changing truth with people...we're

scared people will be mad at us. We're afraid of offending the most easily offended generation in history

- And as a result too many Christians are fine with just letting people believe that they can create their own version of God
 - Now, I am a 6'4" 35 year old white man
 - Now imagine one person leaves here and they are asked about the pastor at Hope Hickory and they describe me as a 5'8" 43 year old asian man
 - And another person says, "Well to me, Pastor Kenny is a 24 year old woman."
 - Then another person says, "Well I don't see Pastor Kenny an actual human per-se, He's more of a nice thought, an idea"
 - You would think those people were completely ridiculous! You would say, are you kidding me! Look at him! You're not describing him for who he is at all!!"
- But that is exactly what so many people do with God now-a-days!
 - God is made out to be open to interpretation to whatever best suits a persons preference!
 - But God told Abraham "I AM WHO I AM"
 - I THE LORD DO NOT CHANGE
 - We do not get to decide who God is....our opinions about God don't mean anything. The only thing that matters is what God says about Himself
 - And Jesus very directly says that there is only one way to God.
 - Jesus says "I AM the way the truth and the life. NO ONE comes to the Father but through Me."

- And Peter directly says, ***“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” -Acts 4:12 (ESV)***
- We have to be able to bluntly, directly, but peacefully speak the Word of God for exactly what it is.
- However, when we do that. We will normally be met with the same response from a lot of people that these apostles were met by:
- ***“When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.” -Acts 5:33 (ESV)***
- Jesus told the apostles to expect this:
- He told them: ***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you.” -John 15:18 (ESV)***
- ***“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” -John 15:20 (ESV)***
- Jesus will always be controversial, the Gospel will always be offensive to many because the Gospel demands a response.
 - Salvation demands submission to His Lordship
 - And that is what the human nature in it’s sinful state hates so much about Christianity, because we are taught never to submit to anything!
 - To make our own truth! To forge our own path!
 - All of it rooted in our desire to call the shots...to be our own God.
- *I remember years ago, being at a religious gathering and talking to a man that said he was on his spiritual journey. Trying to find his path to God.*
 - *And I said, “Hey man, I need to be honest with you. I truly believe that everything that you are looking for can only be found in Jesus. He is the way to God.”*

- And he said, “See, that is what I can’t stand about you Christians. You say that there can only be one way to God. If I want to go to California, there’s not just one road I can take, I can pull out a map and pick whatever route I want to!”
- He was angry with me and my audacity to tell him his path!
- I asked if I could pray with him and he said no. Wanted nothing more to do with me.
- But it was so heartbreaking, because what he failed to understand was that God is not a destination on a map!
 - He is not Someone that we can get to! He came to us! He didn’t just provide the path, HE IS THE PATH!
 - He’s not someone we travel to. Jesus comes to us. He says, **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him..” -Revelation 3:20 (ESV)**
- He takes the pressure and work off of us. He comes to the door of our hearts, all we have to do is open it. Let Him in. Submit to His Kingship.
- And the paradoxical truth of the Gospel is, you will never be more free than when you submit to Jesus
 - You will never be more alive than when you die to yourself and live for Him
- And when He is your Hero that you do everything that you can to emulate, you don’t fear mankind. You fear for them. That they will never know this love, this freedom, the Life, this purpose that comes from having Jesus.
- And as the writer of Hebrews writes: **“We can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” -Hebrews 13:6 (ESV)**

- This is the confidence that these apostles are standing in before this council that wants to kill them like they killed their Hero.
- Verse 34 goes on to say: ***“But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.” -Acts 5:34-40 (ESV)***
- Now, Gamaliel was probably the most respected member of the Sanhedrin. Later we will come to find out that he was the personal mentor of Saul of Tarsus at the time. Who would go on to be the apostle Paul
- And there was wisdom in what he said, there had been numerous so-called “Messianic” uprising, of men claiming to be the Messiah. They had followings, but once their leader was killed, the movement died with them.
- Whether Gamaliel believed or not, he had to have seen a stark contrast in this movement, because their leader had been killed, but the movement continued to grow stronger and at a rapid pace

- So this very well could be the hand of God at work, and if it is, there's nothing that they could do about it
- So he says, "We just need to let this play itself out"
- And they relented, but they still didn't want to just release them. They still wanted to get a message across.
- So they bring the apostles in and line them up.
 - They remove their shirts.
 - And one of the guards, gets out this leather whip that had three long strands on it made of calf skin.
 - Now, this wasn't the same scourging Jesus went through, there were no shards of bone, metal, or glass on the ends of them
 - But one by one, they took one of the apostles, stood him up against a pole or wall, would whip him twice across the back, then turn him around and whip him once across the chest.
 - And then would repeat that process 13 times, before moving on to the next man.
 - And they did this one by one until all of the apostles each received their 39 lashings.
- Surely this would break their spirits a bit. Surely this type of beating would get a message through their skulls.
- Then they all, beaten, bruised, and bloodied—limp out of that council, but to the council's surprise they are not broken and discouraged. No. Verse 41 says: ***"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."*** -Acts 5:41-42 (ESV)
- This is the final way that we see them emulating their Hero, because:

- LIKE JESUS: THEY SUFFERED WITH JOY

- Maybe they remembered Jesus saying, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake” -Matthew 5:10 (ESV)*
 - Or, *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!” -Luke 6:22 (ESV)*
 - Peter would go on to say in his epistle, *“But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,” -1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)*
- How do they get this type of faith, where they can rejoice after being beaten in the painful and humiliating way that they were?!
- Well it's because they had their Hero that they looked up that the writer of Hebrews describes as: ***“...the [Archēgos] and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” -Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)***
- That word joy in this context means, **Joy (Chara): “of a joyful condition or state: to attain blessedness at the right hand of God in Heaven.”**
- Joy can be found in the midst of suffering whenever our joy is tied to Heaven –not to earth
 - It's when our joy is found not in our physical condition— but our spiritual condition
 - If we know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that this world is not our home, this life is but a vapor, and our eternity is secured forever with Jesus— we can face suffering and not let it steal our joy
- And only by emulating Jesus can we actually carry out His teachings to love our enemies, to pray for and bless those who persecute us

- Because that's exactly what we see Jesus doing—As He is on the cross, in more unbearable pain that we could ever imagine. He pushes up on the nails driven through His feet, to muster up the breath and the strength for us to be able to hear Him say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”
 - And I read that and I think, “No I think that they knew what they were doing Jesus!”
 - I think they knew what they were doing when they unjustly tried You.
 - I think they knew what they were doing when they chose Barabbas over You!
 - I think they knew what they were doing when they mocked You, beat You, spit on You, and drove a crown of thorns into Your head!
 - I think they knew what they were doing when they laughed at You hanging on the cross and gambled for Your clothing!
 - It sure looks like they knew what they're doing Jesus!”
- But He says, “No, they don't really know. They don't really know the implications of what is happening here.”
 - “So Father, bless them with forgiveness, I'm doing this for them! So they have the opportunity to come into Your presence with Me one day”
 - When someone slanders you, rejects you, persecutes you for Jesus' sake...they don't really know what they are doing.
 - So in those cases, we emulate Jesus.
- Jesus was focused so much less on those who opposed Him, and more on those who would accept Him.
- And emulating their Hero, these apostles weren't going to waste time griping and complaining about those who hated them and wanted to silence them.

- They didn't have time for that. There was preaching to do. There were houses to visit, there were souls to save.
 - And we would be wise to focus a little less on those who we are against, those who are against us, we would be wise to stop letting them steal our joy
 - And instead focus on the lost that just might open the door of their heart to Jesus
- And along the way, we will face opposition. We will be met with hatred and accusations.
 - Peter would go on to say, ***“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” -1 Peter 4:12-14 (ESV)***
 - And that is only possible, if we make Jesus our Ultimate Hero. Make Jesus the One we look up to and emulate more than anyone or anything else.
 - Because even if we suffer like Jesus
 - We will still love like Jesus...Forgive like Jesus
 - Be peaceful like Jesus...Be peacefully blunt like Jesus
 - Be gracious like Jesus
 - Be compassionate like Jesus
 - Be joyful like Jesus
 - Because as my favorite verse in the book of Hebrews says: ***“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” -Hebrews 10:39 (ESV)***