

Acts (Quality: good)

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[0 : 00] I will direct your attention this evening to the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and verses 41 and 42.

The 41st and 42nd verses of the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. And 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 ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Amen. After considering this morning that principle brought forward by Peter before the council that we ought to obey God rather than men, we find that the reaction of the council to Peter's testimony was murderous.

My friends, they were cut to the heart and took counsel to slay them. An ungracious reaction to a faithful ministry.

[1 : 31] We might say excessive in the bitterness that was there in display.

But man's reaction to the truth is very, very deep if man is walking in a vain show.

That is, those that think they are right and are shown from the truth of God that they are wrong invariably react excessively.

The true ministry of the word has no greater opposition than by the nominally religious body of people.

My friends, the world, that is, the profane world, treat the ministry of the word with comparative indifference. But those that profess are to serve God and then are told that their beliefs are not the true beliefs, that their conduct is not consistent with the glory of the name whom they profess.

[3 : 03] Invariably their reactions are terrible. Now here we see the ungracious reaction of these men of the council who professed to be the eminent religionists of the society and took counsel to slay them.

What an invidious position, naturally speaking, was the position of the apostles standing there before men who had the spirit of murder in their hearts.

But my friends, God hadn't finished with the apostles. He had a work for them yet to do.

And good John Bunyan says, A man is immortal till his work is done. Till God's purposes through any instrument are perfected, nothing can terminate that person's life.

When a person's life is terminated, we may always conclude that God's work through that man or that woman is complete. I've heard people say from time to time, Oh, I wish so and so had been spared.

[4 : 43] They seemed essential to the church. My friends, if a person was essential to the church, God would keep them alive within the church.

We can safely say that according to the perfect wisdom of God, when a godly man, a useful man, may die, that God's use of him is completed.

And therefore, my friends, God takes him to himself. But until God's use of any man is completed, that man cannot die.

If I may interject, a personal experience. Again, I remember when I was exercised for the ministry, my health was so undermined by reason of the burden of the exercise upon my heart that I lost three stone in weight.

I remember my mother saying to me on one occasion, and she knew nothing of the exercise of my spirit. At that time, she said to me, Harold, she said, you won't live, my boy.

[6 : 01] She said, you'll die looking like you do. I answered, my dear mother, mother, I cannot die.

Mother, I cannot die. My friends, feeling, persuaded that the Lord's will for me was to preach the gospel, having an exercise in my heart at that time, I felt I could not die until the Lord had perfected, brought to fruition that exercise of my heart.

For now, you see these apostles, they stood before the council in weakness.

The council, as it were, possessed of the power, but my friends, above the council, a greater power.

A power that was overruling, a power that in sovereignty was exercising an influence, subduing the purpose of those who had murder within them.

[7 : 23] Yes, murder within them. My friends, a murderer is not a free agent. A murderer is not a free agent. You know, we must believe, we do believe believe in a God over all, an absolute sovereign.

Well, let us look into this history and see how the sovereignty of God was in exercise for the preservation of the life of the apostle.

angels. You might say, well now, they needed an intercessor. They needed somebody to speak for them. Their words had provoked wrath, murder in the hearts of the council.

But my friends, God is never wanting for a means to an end. The Lord of hosts is his name. And God appointed that in that council should be a man whose name was Gamaliel.

He was no inferior personality. He was a great power, a force to be reckoned with, a man whose judgment was revered, acknowledged by all concerned.

[8 : 59] I cannot say for a moment that Gamaliel was a good man. His influence over the apostle Paul who sat at his feet, you remember, who received an education through Gamaliel which was considered to be the best education of the day.

My friends, his influence upon the apostle didn't lead the apostle in right paths, did it? It didn't bring forth those fruits in the life of the apostle that were constructive to the glory of Christ and the benefit of the true church.

No, it rather led him in the other direction. But here God is using Gamaliel as an instrument.

I believe in the case of the apostle Paul, he also used Gamaliel as an instrument, that he should be naturally equipped as among the learning to speak forth the truth eventually from a sanctified heart.

You see, education is profitable, it's good, it's beneficial as the Lord may use it.

[10 : 20] for now to return then stood there up one in the council of Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law had in reputation among all the people and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.

what a wonderful thing that God should take that instrument to intercede for the deliverance of these men.

He was a Pharisee, he was not in sympathy with the doctrine of the apostles but nevertheless my friends God so turned his heart and mind in a certain direction that what he said had an influence to the preservation of those whom God determined should be preserved.

He didn't, he wasn't converted to see exactly with the apostles that wasn't necessary to God's determined end but God gave him a condition of mind that fulfilled God's purposes toward his servants that they may be set free that they may be delivered from those who had murderous intent within their hearts.

let me repeat God is never wanting for a means to an end. God is never frustrated by the lack of an instrument to perform his pleasure.

[12 : 25] my friends we read in our lesson this evening of Cyrus Cyrus whose right hand God says he has holden in the 45th chapter the Lord says I am the Lord and there is none else and there is no God beside me I girded thee Cyrus though thou hast not known me I girded thee Cyrus though thou hast not known me and he says in another place I have surnamed thee though thou hast not known me you see the burden of scripture would signify to our minds that although

God used Cyrus for the rebuilding of the temple and the deliverance of his people Israel according to his promise yet Cyrus didn't know the God who was using him Cyrus didn't know the God who was using him and my friends here it seems that God is using Gamaliel and Gamaliel didn't know the God that was using him now that's a very searching consideration that God may use us and yet we know not the God that's using us you think of Judas he was selected among the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ he knew not Christ as the others knew him but yet my friends he preached the gospel and he preached the gospel effectually because the others didn't distinguish that there was something lacking in

Judas ministry that was deposited in their own God may use us instrumentally I remember a dear old minister some of you knew him Charles Henry Gascoyne of Wellingborough when I was a lad and I remember him coming into Coventry pulpit and speaking of scaffold poles scaffold poles and he spoke of the church as the building of God pounded and grounded upon the corner stone Jesus Christ and he said friends he said while there's a building going up he said there are a scaffold pole he said but when the building is complete the scaffold poles are taken away they have no further part in the building and he spoke very searchingly upon that theme with regard to certain people in the church and

I remember well him saying and it rather staggered me at that time that it's possible to preach the gospel and be a scaffold pole in Zion that God can put words into your mouth my friends he did Balaam's didn't he he put wonderful words in Balaam's man that may be of benefit to our hearts as they are recorded in scripture and yet Balaam had no part or lot in the things of God you know Gamaliel was used used of God to the liberation of his servants from death death but my friends it seems as though he was ignorant of a saving knowledge of the God that used him now Gamaliel commanded to put the apostles forth a little space people now he didn't want to be identified with them no he didn't want to be identified with them and I don't believe he wanted them to be encouraged encouraged by him saying what he was about to say he wanted to remain as it were neutral he wanted my friends to be impartial so to speak but he was going to bring history to bear upon the situation and I believe such was the spirit of compromise in his heart that all he wanted was that these men might be let go and remember

God was using him God was using him and God gave him that disposition of thought consistent with the end design now he brings two things to bear upon the minds he says ye men of Israel take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men now be careful there are two things in history that are worth your notice there was one Thodos boasting himself to be somebody he was a proud man to whom a number of men about 400 joined themselves yes he gained some initial support 400 men joined themselves to him but he was slain and all as many as obeyed him were scattered and brought to naught so Thodos he didn't continue very long and the 400 that were with him were soon scattered and it all came to nothing then he goes on and he says after this man rose up

[19 : 02] Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing the days of the enrolment around the birth of Jesus Christ and drew away much people after him he also perished and all even as many as obeyed him were dispersed so that came to nothing that came to nothing so there are two instances in recent history says Gamaliel that testify that men for a time gather a bit of support and make themselves to be somebody but it soon peters out and it soon falls away now he says treat these men on the same ground don't don't be over concerned about them now I say unto you refrain from these men and let them alone for if this counsel or this work be of men it will come to naught yes it will come to naught now there's something very wise and very deep in the principle that

Gamaliel brings forward in argument at this time except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it he's saying in essence isn't he let them alone for if this counsel or this work be of men it will come to naught with Thodos it petered out with Judas in the days of taxing it petered out if these men are actuated by their own ambitions and their doctrine finds its rise within their own hearts it will soon come to nothing it won't live it won't last but he goes on to say but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it lest happily ye be found even to fight against

God now he doesn't pass a judgment himself does he he doesn't pass a judgment he just declares the truth that if it if there cause is of men it won't live it won't last but if it is of God it will and the oppositions of men cannot by any means overthrow it well now my friends we know don't we by the lasting effect of the cause of the apostles their doctrine was indeed of God it's lived to the present moment of time we're here tonight because their doctrine still lives and it will continue to live yes it is of God men cannot overthrow it they have been seeking to overthrow it generation by generation we had the terrible scourge of martyrdom through our country when the witness of the truth was in jeopardy when men rose up attempting to extinguish the light of truth and witness in our land but my friends it was of

God it couldn't be overthrown no it was of God it shone more brightly than ever after the persecution than it did before and how thankful we are to those who lost their lives for the cause of God and truth that we have inherited such an inheritance that we enjoy the pure doctrine of God as at this day now my friends we see that Gamaliel then argues upon the ground of true principles there's no question that what he said was questionable he spoke the truth sound principle things that have their rise in man soon fall away those things that have their rise in

God continue continue they last they live now he said but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it lest happily ye be found even to fight against God well let it go and let's see what happens that's what he said treat it with comparative indifference and see the eventual result it will be known if it is of God or not whether it prospers or whether it peters out now while he was arguing on the ground of sound principle he was inclining the hearts of those responsible in an authoritative position and place to do something which was inconsistent with the mind of

[25 : 00] God toward them my friends people in responsible positions have a responsibility not just to fold their arms and say well we'll see what happens if it's of God it will prosper if it's of men it will come to nothing how the forces of evil would take advantage of such a situation if it was generally practice if men of irresponsible positions seek to divorce themselves from their responsibilities in the administration of justice my friends how quickly would the forces of evil take advantage and spread from one coast to the other their evil influences remember that Gamaliel was a doctor of the law and he was talking to the council who were responsible for the administration of law and justice in

Israel he was telling them look fold your arms and see what happens my friends although the principle of his teaching was right yet in that he was saying if it is of God it will prosper if it's not of God it will come to nothing but he was bringing forward the final judgment so to speak whereas God has delegated responsibilities to men magistrates have a responsibility to God for the administration of justice parents have a responsibility to God for the administration of parental control over their children my friends in my family and in yours what justification would there be for us to hold our arms and say well let them do as they like if they if their counsel is not of God it will come to nothing and if it is of

God it will prosper a fatalistic dependence upon sovereignty won't do will it it won't do Gamaliel was talking like a fatalist he was saying leave it in the hands of God there's nothing we can do about it my friends if we did that in our families and we said well let the children run free if they don't want to go to chapel don't make them go to chapel if they don't want to read the Bible well they shouldn't read the Bible let them do as they like well now that's fatalism isn't it God has said to us as parents we've got a responsibility to our children that we should bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and therefore my friends we must exercise that responsibility in so far as God limits it according to his purpose and again with magistrates well for magistrates to divorce themselves from the administration of justice in a natural way and say well let society go free let the people please themselves if it be of men it will come to nothing if it will be if it's of

God you can't overthrow it so let everything go free well my friends that very doctrine is in practice today and it's having its effect which you can see and we can see if this is practice before any other than godly men if this permissiveness this liberty is exercised with regard to the ungodly my friends they'll take advantage of it to the promotion of ungodliness in a way that's terrible to consider magistrate church placed in office by God to stem that tide to hold in check that evil propensity if society were set at liberty and I say the fact that those responsible for the administration of law and justice are letting things go that is divorcing themselves from their responsibilities more and more we see what's happening in society and my friends it's the very fatalistic tendency which

Gamaliel is placing before the council if you let a child go free if you always give a child what it wants you always let it go where it wants to go have its own way in everything where's the evil heart that that child is born with going to carry that child my friends you and I have a responsibility as parents to restrain that child from those things that will prove its ruin naturally and spiritually if left uncontrolled so we might say that Gamaliel in the exercise of natural wisdom promotes a false consequence from true principles he would incline the hearts of the council to let things work out now in the case of the apostles it did no harm it laws are for the lawless and disobedient

[31 : 30] I hope it's not necessary in any case within the walls of this chapel for it to be upon the national statute book thou shalt not steal because my friends I trust that there is no inclination in our hearts to steal we appreciate those things that belong to our neighbors and we would not for any reason trespass upon his ground take from him those things which lawfully are his so that the fact that a law is written on our statute book contrary to thieving it doesn't affect us laws are made for the lawless and disobedient now the fact that Gamaliel argued this way and

Peter and his fellow apostles were set free my friends that wasn't the disadvantage of any was it they didn't go out and corrupt the multitude did they they went out to preach a doctrine to salvation they went out to promote the well being of the people that was their whole purpose and intent so you see that laws are made to restrain ungodliness my friends if the world was pure Gamaliel's testimony would stand but as we live in an impure world the consequence of his principles would be terrible to contemplate to set people free from law is as it were to liberate the lusts of man's fallen nature to a degree that would make the world uninhabitable in the finality

I often remember my dear old grandfather now in heaven saying on one occasion he said it's of the mercy of God that the world is a place fit to live in it's of the mercy of God that the world is a place fit to live in that is if the wickedness of man's heart was not restrained by God in any wise my friends the world would be an unfit place to live in you know God has a restraining influence over the ungodly and they don't know it he does the whole of morality is attributable to God's mercy God is exercising a restraint upon mankind and yet man doesn't acknowledge him but I trust that you and

I can see it and are thankful for it well now God used Gamaliel and his argument the council received and to him they agreed and when they had called the apostles and beaten them they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go now the apostles were beaten they were beaten they were accounted worthy of stripes the Lord preserved them from death but he didn't preserve them from stripes but look how this was sanctified and they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name isn't that wonderful they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing not mourning not rebelling and repining that

God had permitted them to be beaten rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name anything associated with Jesus Christ is an honour this is how they calculate it anything that's associated with the name of Jesus Christ is an honour even if it be shame even if it occasion strikes my friends do you know what it is to count it an honour to suffer for Jesus sake perhaps you've fallen sometimes under the reproach of men you've counted it an honour because it is for Jesus sake that you're counted worthy of reproach those things associated with the name of

[37 : 37] Jesus Christ are honours they're honours Christian fellow Christian if you suffer bitter and false accusations from the lips of your fellows for Jesus sake put them as medals upon your breast wear them upon the Christian uniform as the soldier wears the medals received in the battles my friends these are honours honours in the Christian life of faith fight the good fight of faith yes he says Christ says if they persecuted you they will also if they persecuted me they will also persecute you so wherein you are identified with the captain of your salvation count it an honour wear it as a medal my friends it's a great price in the sight of

God if we suffer for Jesus sake now they counted worth they were counted worthy and they rejoice rejoice and be exceeding glad says Christ for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you if you're suffering for Jesus sake you've got ground for rejoicing not for mourning and then he says and daily in the temple in every house they cease not to teach and preach Jesus Christ now they weren't deterred from their purpose they didn't deviate from their commission they received from Christ Jesus that most solemn and sacred commission go you out into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature here we find them my friends daily in the employ going back again in the temple that public place of concourse where the people gathered for the worship of God there they went and stood contrary to the council yes they'd been beaten for so doing but it didn't deter them they kept to the will of

God they maintained a straight course knowing that God would be with them and should they suffer for so doing it would be overruled for God daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not and in every house my friends these men were men of God indeed their one purpose in life was the promotion of the cause of Christ and as they went about their purpose was to set forth this doctrine the only saving doctrine Jesus Christ oh what a wonderful example herein is set before us that in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach

Jesus Christ to illuminate the minds and hearts of the people to as it were impregnate their thinking their affection with this glorious doctrine that Jesus Christ alone can save and so my friends we would in our measure follow in their step remembering that though we may suffer for standing firm to the principles of the divine commission and call the great end of all religion is that fallen men may look to Jesus

Christ and him only for salvation the apostle Paul says in the same context for I am determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified yes these men were men of God their ambition their principle was to set down every man woman and child upon the glorious truth of salvation for sinners through Jesus Christ and him only amen to be and she was to