

To Be Know – Acts 5:12-42

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



It has been a rollercoaster of a ride for Peter. He has gone from the heights of bravado where he told Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.” To the depths of despair when he realized how untrue that claim was in the face of his denials. Then, Jesus came back, and he, like the rest of the disciples were doubtful and not sure what to make of it. Thomas emphatically stated what they were all feeling and said, I’ll only believe it’s you if I can touch the holes in your hands and side. To that request, Jesus graciously acquiesced. Then, there were the 40 days Jesus spent with them and appeared to over 500 others, proving the reality of his resurrection. There could be no denying it at this point. Peter was sure that now, since Jesus defeated the Romans, the religious leaders, and the grave, that he would restore Israel to its rightful position as chief among the nations... but then, Jesus did something different. He told them that he was going away to be with his Father, that they would receive the promised Holy Spirit, and with the power of the Spirit, they would bear witness to the truth of the resurrection in Jerusalem and every corner of the world.

The twists and turns of following Jesus have led to some unexpected experiences for Peter, John, and the disciples. And when the Holy Spirit comes, that trend will continue. The very first thing that happens is they speak about the truth of the resurrection in languages that they did not know! After all, they were simple men of Galilee, and here the nations who are gathered in Jerusalem hear and respond in belief. Then, Peter and John heal a man who hasn’t walked in forty years! Peter has watched this group of 120 quickly grow to 8,000+. Then Ananias and Sapphira happened; no one expected that especially Peter. But, God will not be deceived, and his people must know that he really is sovereign. Now, all the sick need to do to be healed is be touched by Peter’s shadow! Word has spread, and people are flocking to Jerusalem. I wonder if Peter, at this point, sits down at night and asks himself the question of, why? Why is this happening? What is God really up to? Why him? The truth is that God is up to the very same thing in this season of Peter’s life that he has always been up to. And, it is the very same thing that he is doing in and through us today. **He is making himself known.** And, if there is anything we can see in Peter’s story and the expansion of the church, it is that **God will stop at nothing to make himself known.**

1. God's greatest desire is to be known. (5:12-16)

- a. How God has made himself known:
 - i. Known before sin to Adam & Eve.
 - ii. Known to individuals (Noah & Job).
 - iii. Known through Abraham's family. → You will be a blessing. (Gen. 12)
 - iv. Known through the Exodus. → Cloud & Fire (Exod. 13:21-22)
 - v. Known through the Judges.
 - vi. Known through the Kings & Prophets.
 - vii. Fully known through Jesus. → John 1:14
 - viii. He continues to make Himself known through the church.
- b. **What is the purpose of the healings and miracles?**
 - i. The apostolic ministry is in the midst of the Jewish people, not just in the far corners of their own congregations. On the one hand, fear keeps "the rest" from joining the apostles, even though their ministry is viewed with respect (v. 13; on "the rest," see below).
 - ii. **Yet, for others, the activity leads them to become believers (v. 14).** The tension of expression between these two verses suggests the presence of a combination of sources.¹
 - 1. **We have watched God make himself known in the storyline of Acts in ways that are indisputable.**
 - a. Peter has preached in other languages (Acts 2), healed the sick (Acts 4 & 5), and even Ananias and Sapphira's death are indisputable evidence of the presence of God.
 - 2. This is not new for God to work in mighty ways.
 - a. Consider Elijah and the prophets of Baal. (1 Kings 18:20-40)
 - i. **²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."**
 - 1. What a statement!!! LOL!
 - ii. **³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God."**
 - 1. God will make himself known.
- c. **There is a sense of reverence among the people. (v.13)**
 - i. "The rest" is a bit of a puzzling expression; Luke might have several implications for this phrase.
 - 1. It most likely includes both Christians and non-Christians.
 - 2. What is most clear is that it describes and helps us to understand the tone of the situation. It wasn't all excitement and jubilee. There was a seriousness to what was happening and people were fully weighing the situation.²
 - ii. There are those of Jerusalem who are scared off by the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira. This may be a factor but is not the only cause of the fear. Against the apostolic

¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 229.

² I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 122.

judgment being the major cause of fear is the recognition that *if* one is honest, there is no reason to fear such apostolic judgment.³

1. While many are coming to faith, there is an uncertainty in the hearts of some.
 - a. They may have been frightened lest half-hearted allegiance would lead to judgment.⁴
 2. **What is clear is that they know that whatever is going on, it is no mere human endeavor. It is exclusively of the divine.**
 - a. This notion will be revealed in the words of Gamaliel later in the passage. (vv.38-39)
- d. **Just as Jesus was known far and wide... now His Church is becoming known. (v.16)**
- i. A new feature is the spread of the reputation of the church to *the towns around Jerusalem*. The implication is that at this stage, Peter and the other apostles confined themselves to Jerusalem so that the sick had to be brought to them. Later they would begin to itinerate as missionaries.⁵
 1. James, in his letter to a group of Christians, will remind them that even their persecutions that have caused them to flee can be counted as joy. Why?
 - a. First, it will produce a harvest of righteousness. (Jam. 1:2-4)
 - b. Second, we will see from church history that persecution played a significant role in the expansion of the church in the first 300 years.
 - ii. **We might need to pause and consider the good of the pressures we face today.**
 1. A refinement of our own faith.
 2. A burning away of the dross of doctrine and really distilling down to what is essential and theological. Verses what is cultural and contextual.
 - a. Example: If the Apostles were to walk into our church today, much of the morning would feel foreign to them.
 - i. First, the largest church in the 1st century were those in Colossae, and they numbered around 200 per church.
 - ii. Second, the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper is different than what they did.

2. There is only one message that makes God known... The Gospel. (5:20)

- a. It wasn't enough for Peter to simply perform miracles; the words of "this Life" needed to be spoken.
- b. **And this Life had to be spoken as well as lived.** 'Go and speak to all the people *the words* of this Life.' Of course, the words had to be rooted in the reality of the way the apostles were living and the work of healing they were doing.
- c. **But wordless symbols, however powerful, remain open to a variety of explanation.** From the very beginning, the apostolic **faith** has been something that demands to be explained, that needs to be taught.
 - i. There is much to say because people fill their heads with all kinds of half-truths or downright untruths.
 - ii. Things need to be spelled out carefully step by step: who Jesus was and is, what God did through him, how it all drew to its head the long scriptural story of God's people, what it all meant in terms of the long-awaited '**kingdom of God**'⁶

³ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 230–231.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 122.

⁵ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 122–123.

⁶ Tom Wright, [Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 88.

- iii. Consider the power of the setting: The Temple at dawn.
- iv. Might the crowd note the apostles' arrest, which was a public act, and see their release, or at least their presence in the temple now, as a picture of God's deliverance? The resurrection, which the Sadducees deny, would certainly be part of the apostles' message (see vv. 30–31). The preaching would have come at dawn since the temple is closed at night.⁷
- d. **General revelation vs. Special revelation**
 - i. There are lots of good arguments for the existence of God.⁸
 - 1. **Moral argument:** Because we yearn for morality and ethics, there must be a moral agent.
 - 2. **Kalām Cosmological argument:** If something exists, it has a cause, and the universe exists; therefore, something caused the universe.
 - 3. **Ontological argument:** It is more likely that there is a maximally great being than not.
 - ii. **The best that these can do is shine a light on the reality of the existence of the divine.**
 - 1. **We need the gospel to make the nature and name of God clear.**
 - iii. The *temple* was the appropriate place for such proclamation, not only because it was a well-frequented place but above all because it was the **place where God had chosen to make himself known** to the people of Israel.
 - 1. **The phrase *all the words of this Life* is similar to 'the message of this salvation' (13:26; in Syriac 'life' and 'salvation' are rendered by the same word).**⁹
 - 2. Again, they were not just to live in a way that demonstrated their changed hearts, minds, and lives, but they were to proclaim the message of salvation.
 - a. What is the message of salvation? → The resurrection!
 - b. **Do I feel prepared and equipped to share the message of salvation if an opportunity arises?**
 - i. Who is Jesus?
 - ii. What was my need? (Be specific)
 - iii. What has changed in my life? → This is the most powerful aspect.

3. Our pride prevents presence with God. (5:21-40) (Cf. 5:17)

- a. The religious leaders were blinded to the truth of what was happening in their midst because of their pride.
 - i. **It is the same pride that caused them to kill Jesus in the first place. (v.30)**
 - 1. **Nor could they shift the responsibility, if they were so inclined, by attributing Jesus' death to the Romans, since they had themselves been responsible for giving Jesus what could be regarded as a Jewish form of execution,** described in the Old Testament as hanging on a gibbet (Deut. 21:22f.; cf. Acts 10:39; 13:29; Gal. 3:13); one may wonder whether there is a hint of the idea, developed by Paul, that a person who so died was regarded as being under the curse of God (Deut. 21:23).¹⁰
 - ii. **They had a great deal of power and status to lose. (cf. v.17)**
 - 1. The council members are full of jealousy (ζήλου, *zēlou*; a genitive of content, Wallace 1996: 94). The Sadducees are often seen as more hostile to the new

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 239.

⁸ See William Lane Craig's Reasonable Faith for explanations on these arguments.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 125.

¹⁰ I. Howard Marshall, [Acts: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 5, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 126–127.

- movement than the Pharisees in Acts, whereas in Luke's Gospel, the Pharisees are major opponents of Jesus.
2. This fits the shift of attention to Jerusalem from the setting of Jesus's ministry outside the city. **The Sadducees have more to lose, since they control the council and have worked out a compromise with the Romans to share power. Any destabilizing element in the culture could threaten their control.**¹¹
- b. Their pride and fear of a loss of control drove them to miss the Messiah and now to miss the "obvious" signs of God's hand on this new movement.
- i. **We can easily sit here in our seats and cast judgment on them, thinking we would have been different, but would we really have been different?**
 - ii. **"We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, yet more loved and accepted in Jesus than we ever dared hope."** – Tim Keller
 1. The reality is that we are deeply flawed, and too often, we have too high of a view of self. But, the longer we follow God, and the more we are willing to lay our whole selves before him, the more he will reveal to us what needs to be repented of.
 2. The good news is that in Jesus, we are fully loved and accepted even while that stripping away work is being done.
 - a. **In fact, it is the love, acceptance, and security that we have in Jesus that allows and enables us to be receptive to the refining work of God.**
- c. **What barriers do we put up that prevent presence with God?**
- i. All of our barriers, whether they come from confidence or insecurity, make the same confession, "We know better."
 1. **Priority:** "I don't have time." Or, "When I have the time... I will..."
 2. **Skepticism:** "How will this change anything?"
 3. **Intrusion:** "God doesn't need to be bothered by me." Or, "He has more important things to deal with."
 4. **Knowledge:** "If I knew more..."
 5. **Comfort:** "I'm doing OK."

4. The goal of the Christian life is to glorify God. (5:41-42)

- a. Jesus affirms this idea: Obedience to the Father is his food.
 - i. **Jesus refers to the Father over 180 times in the Gospels.**¹²
 - ii. **Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (Jn. 4:34)**
 1. They are in Samaria and urging him to eat. Yes, he needed lunch, but here again, Jesus contrasts the finite satisfaction of this life with the infinite satisfaction of eternal life.
 - iii. **⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."** (Jn. 12:49-50)
- b. **We glorify the Lord when we live out the gospel and when we verbalize the gospel... "Speak the words of this Life"**

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 237–238.

¹² See Dan Spader's notes in "Foundations."

- i. Just like Jesus, the Apostles, and the Church, if we proclaim the gospel in a hostile context, we should expect pushback.
 - 1. We do need to be cautioned on what is and isn't pushback because of the gospel.
- ii. Caution #1: We must not confuse blowback from poor tactics and brashness for persecution.
 - 1. The way we go about sharing the gospel is just as important as the message we share.
 - 2. We will see this clearly in Acts 17 when Paul addresses the crowds in Athens.
- iii. Caution #2: We must not confuse pushback for political or cultural stances for religious persecution.
 - 1. This does not mean that your stance is wrong; it just means it may not be a major of the faith.
 - 2. Christians are not monolithic politically or culturally, and we must be careful not to tangle opinions and perspectives with the essentials of the faith.
 - a. We face a risk of polarization and division by elevating non-essentials and non-theological issues to the level of essential.
 - i. The division, outrage, and solidification of "camps" is precisely the playbook of our prevailing culture. We must live in a way that shows in Jesus there is a better path of love and respect, where we can disagree charitably while working for the betterment of those around us.
 - ii. **What is the most important way to work for the betterment of those around us? → Share the gospel.**
- c. **They counted it a joy to suffer for the gospel. Why? Because Jesus suffered too.**
 - i. In a strongly shame-honor-oriented society, to be dishonored normally would be considered shameful. **The phrase "counted worthy to suffer dishonor" is an oxymoron, a dishonor that is a cause for joy.** The leaders beat them to produce shame. They hope that the shame might function as a deterrent and stop their preaching or at least persuade others not to heed them.¹³
 - 1. We would see their suffering not as shameful but as unjust.
 - a. We live and operate in a culture of justice.
 - ii. What is our perspective on suffering?
 - 1. **Jesus established the model of innocent suffering** (Luke 23:1–25). The apostles are following it, showing in an exemplary manner what discipleship entails. God is watching over them in the midst of the suffering. **Victory can come through suffering.** Political power will not stop them.¹⁴
 - 2. **"Whenever our suffering becomes Christ's suffering and our agony Christ's agony, we know in our innermost being that suffering and agony will not be able to destroy our gratitude since we have found our peace in Him, a peace that is not of this world."** – Henri Nouwen¹⁵
 - iii. **How might we suffer innocently today? (There is no easy answer.)**
 - 1. Do not return anger with anger. (I.e., Be a peacemaker.)
 - 2. Be more Biblical and not less.
 - 3. Proclaim the gospel with fervency.

¹³ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 252.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 236–237.

¹⁵ Henri Nouwen, "Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader" p. 237

4. Be willing to be more generous than what seems rational.
 5. Make Jesus the central issue... not other things.
- iv. **A key question to ask: Does my suffering resemble that of Jesus?**
1. God wants to make himself known through every aspect of my life, and as we see here, that very well may include suffering.
 - a. More of Jesus... and less of me. (Jn. 3:30)

God has always been in the business of making himself known, even before the fall when sin and brokenness entered the world. And since then, he has always been about restoring broken lives, and through those lives, he continues to make himself known. Yes, the miracles and glorious victories that we see in the Bible and even in our own lives are powerful testimonies of God's presence and goodness. But, maybe, just maybe, the way God equips us to walk through suffering and hardship is as powerful a testimony as a victory. The gracious and beautiful thing is that whether in victory or in suffering, we are able to glorify God. And, even more amazing, through our victories or sufferings, God is able to make himself and his goodness known. After all, the good God of the universe will **stop at nothing to make Himself known.**