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## Sermon Study on Acts 5:34-42

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streuten und verstedten Artifel mit den ernstest, wahren Worten: "In the case of Daniel, Daniel is with us, Christ is with us. *Caveat criticus!*"<sup>6)</sup> Aber wie weit die moderne Bibelkritik auch schon in die amerikanisch-lutherische Kirche eingebrungen ist, zeigt der neue im Kreise der United Lutheran Church erschienene *New Testament Commentary*, Herbert C. Alleman, Editor. Dort sagt Prof. H. L. Stamm vom Seminar in Gettysburg, Pa., in dem Kapitel "The Historical Relationships of Christianity" unter anderm: "The Book of Daniel was a tract written for these troublous times when King Antiochus, enraged by the failure of his plans to conquer Egypt, determined to punish the Jews for the trouble they had been making him." "Antiochus Epiphanes was the Darius of the Book of Daniel. He was also the Nebuchadnezzar with the golden image and the fiery furnace, the king whose very fury to compel the Jews to abandon their religion was self-defeating." "As we have already seen in our study of the Book of Daniel, apocalyptic is essentially past history written in the future tense. The apocalypticist wrote history in the form of prediction. This does not mean that he deceived his readers by writing under the assumed name of some ancient worthy such as Daniel or Enoch or Ezra. The writers of the apocalypses and their first readers understood the literary device. It was only the succeeding generations, for whom their works were not immediately intended, who began to misunderstand them."<sup>7)</sup>

Am Schluß des Kapitels wird noch hervorgehoben, daß Daniel ganz dahingenommen war und mehrere Tage lang krank lag, so ergriffen war er von dieser Offenbarung. Das können wir wohl verstehen. „O welch eine Tiefe des Reichthums!“ Röm. 11, 33-36. Voller Verwunderung war er über das Gesicht, aber niemand erfuhr es, und er verrichtete weiter seinen Dienst am königlichen Hofe. L. Fürbringer

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### Sermon Study on Acts 5:34-42

Eisenach Epistle for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity

The time of peaceful, undisturbed spreading of the Gospel was past. The words of the Savior Matt. 10:17 had begun to be fulfilled. The Apostles Peter and John had been imprisoned and forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus, Acts 4:3, 18. Harkening unto God more than unto the enemies, v. 19, they continued to preach salvation through the name of Jesus, performing many miracles, 5:12, 15, 16, and great multitudes both of men and women were added to the number of believers, v. 14. Viewing with alarm

<sup>6)</sup> *Princeton Theological Review*, 22 (1924), 401.

<sup>7)</sup> Aprilheft dieser Zeitschrift, S. 296.



the rapid spread of the Word, the high priest, together with some of the other leaders of the Sadducees, again were filled with indignation, with fanatical zeal, and determined to put an end to this movement, 5:17, 18; cp. Acts 4:1-3. Released by the angel, the apostles went to the Temple and preached. Disturbed by this manifest interference of a higher authority and perplexed "whereunto this would grow," fearful of the people, who would certainly avenge any act of violence against the apostles, tormented by their own conscience, v. 28 (last words), the enemies make one more effort to stop at least the preaching of Jesus as the Messiah by bullying the apostles into silence. The Lord fulfilled His promise, Matt. 10:19, 20. Before this august assembly the apostles boldly confessed Jesus of Nazareth as the only Savior, urged them who slew Jesus to repent and obtain forgiveness in His name, and pointblank refused to obey men rather than God, finally charging them indirectly with disobedience to God, 29-32. This bold, courageous speech so enraged the Sanhedrin that they took counsel to put them to death, momentarily forgetting their fear of the people. At this critical moment, while the members of the council were deliberating, consulting together (note the imperfect), Gamaliel rose, and by his advice succeeded in preventing his colleagues from committing a rash act and its fatal consequences for themselves and in saving the apostles from an untimely death.

V. 34: *Then stood there up one in the Council, a 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.* While, of course, there can be no absolute certainty in the matter, there is no reasonable doubt that the Gamaliel of our text and of Acts 22, 3 is identical with the renowned Gamaliel, who died about eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 53. What we know from other sources about the age, the character, the reputation, of Gamaliel the Elder, the grandson of the great Hillel, agrees so fully with what Luke tells us about the man, that practically all commentators identify the two. The school which his grandfather founded mediated between the rationalism, the worldliness, the epicureanism, of the Sadducees and the harsh, stern, literalistic legalism of the school of Shammai. Hillel was one of the most learned Rabbis of antiquity, a defender, in the main, of the old Jewish orthodoxy, yet able to adapt himself to changing circumstances, gifted with a flexibility altogether impossible to the school of Shammai, Hillel's great rival. Gamaliel seems to have inherited the intellectual power and the chief character traits of his grandfather. Luke tells us that he was "a Pharisee, a doctor of the Law, had in reputation among all the people." From other sources we learn that he was called the "Glory of the Law," and in the Mishnah his decisions are often



quoted, and usually favorably. In fact, he was the first of seven to be called *Rabban*, our teacher, a title conferring greater honor than the mere *Rabbi*, or *Rab*. The fixation of the annual calendar, of the new moons, the intercalary months, the festival days, was entrusted to him. The opinion and advice of such a man carried great weight, so that even his opponents did not dare to set it aside, partly because they saw the sanity, the reasonableness, of his position, partly because they feared to lose their prestige with the people if they would openly antagonize this influential man. At the same time Gamaliel was possessed of a broad-mindedness and toleration rarely met with in his sect. Many of his decisions and opinions as quoted in the Talmud lack the bigotry and sternness usually regarded as characteristic of Pharisaism, and some seem to have been given for the very purpose of mitigating some of the harsher customs advocated by former teachers. His toleration in matters pertaining to religion went so far that in Ptolemais he bathed in a hall wherein stood a statue of the pagan goddess Aphrodite, an abhorring to the ordinary Jew, an abomination particularly to the Pharisee. His pupil Saul evidently did not imbibe from him his spirit of liberalism and toleration but only the veneration for the Law of the fathers.

There is no foundation to the ancient tradition that Gamaliel became a convert to Christianity, was baptized by Peter and John, and that he was buried with Christian honors. Luke, writing after his death, would not have failed to mention his conversion if it had occurred. We shall see that our text gives not the slightest warrant for the belief that Gamaliel was a second Nicodemus, a secret disciple of Jesus.

Luke, the master historian, with a few strokes of the pen, pictures to us the authority, the prestige, the tolerance, the diplomatic astuteness, of this leader of the Jews. "Then stood there up one in the Council." Gamaliel recognizes that a critical moment has come. A decision of some kind must be made. He is not ready to go so far as the Sadducees, yet is not willing to oppose them in the presence of the apostles, since that would make them eye- and ear-witnesses of a possible dissension among the members of the Council. This must be prevented. First arrive at some unified course of action; then let the apostles hear their unanimous decision. He rises to his feet, drawing the attention of the apostles away from the discussions of the Sadducees and that of the Sadducees from their angry argumentations. All eyes and minds are fixed on him, the man whose authority was recognized and acknowledged by all. He makes use of this authority by commanding that the apostles "be put forth a little space," or, as it also may be translated, a little while. On a former occasion, Acts 4:15, the Council had commanded the apostles to "go aside out of the Coun-



cil." Here Gamaliel personally commands the servants to remove the apostles from the council chamber. His command is carried out at once; no one questions his right to demand their removal even before he has stated any reason for his action. And now he turns to the Sadducees in an effort to win them over to a more tolerant view of the situation. In order to gain his point, he no longer commands, but uses the language of tactful persuasion. "Ye men of Israel," "men, Israelites," he addresses them. That was the theocratic name of the Jews, reminding them that they were members of the covenant people. They are Israelites, God's own chosen people. That very fact ought to induce them to listen carefully to what he has to tell them as men so highly honored. Note that Peter, Acts 2:22; 3:12, and Paul, 13:16, make use of this same exalted title to gain the attention and good will of their audience. Cp. also 2 Cor. 11:22 and Acts 21:28. He did not call them by their party name. His purpose was not to stress the difference between Sadducees and Pharisees, to use this occasion to deepen the rift between the two parties. In this crisis the council must present a united front, and for that reason he sought an opportunity to persuade the Sadducees not to be swayed by intolerant hatred and fanatical zeal but to adopt a policy of moderation, of watchful waiting, of suspended judgment, until matters would perhaps adjust themselves without their interference.

*Take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.* One might place a comma after τοῖς, as does Luther, or after ταυτοῖς, as in the Authorized Version. We prefer the latter construction. "In favor of the latter it may be said that the construction πράσσειν τι ἐπί τινι is very common, whereas προσέχειν ταυτοῖς is never found in connection with ἐπί, and that this rendering rightly marks the evidently emphatic position of 'these men.'" (*Expositor's Greek New Testament.*) Gamaliel asks his colleagues to guard themselves, the Greek phrase being used quite frequently in the Septuagint for נִשְׁמַר, the Niphal expressing in the Hebrew the same reflexive use of the term as the Greek ταυτοῖς. They should give heed to their own interests and welfare. He assures them that he is not speaking from personal motives, from self-interest; that he is concerned only for their own welfare. His intention is to warn them before they have gone too far, before they decide on a way of action which might cause them bitter regrets, which they might vainly wish to undo. Consider carefully what ye are about to do; guard against undue hastiness in doing away with these men. There is really no need to hurry your decision; on the contrary, any rashness on your part may prove harmful to you. In order to calm them, he first calls their attention to the historical facts that other seemingly dangerous movements of a politico-religious nature came to naught without their interference,



in the natural order of events. Only after having shown them the needlessness of any hurried action does he speak of the evil consequences for themselves which might result from any overt act of violence against the apostles. Gamaliel was a master of diplomacy, and it need not surprise us that he gained his point.

Vv. 36, 37: *For, before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to naught. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing and drew away much people after him; he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.* Gamaliel reminds his colleagues of a fact well known to all of them. This was not the first time that the populace had been caught up in a movement which threatened to become nation-wide and to disturb the peace and welfare of the Jewish state. In fact, the past four or five decades had been a time, as Josephus states, when there were ten thousand disorders in Judea, which were like tumults because a great number assumed a warlike attitude. (*Ant.*, XVII:10, 4.) After naming several leaders who had "gotten together a multitude of men of a profligate character," Josephus continues: "And now Judea was full of robberies; and as the several companies of the seditious lighted upon any one to lead them, he was created a king immediately, in order to do mischief to the public." (XVII:10, 8.) Gamaliel names two of these leaders, both of whom had come to grief after disturbing the nation's peace, Theudas and Judas. Josephus also speaks of a Theudas, a magician, who persuaded the greater part of the people to follow him but was finally defeated and put to death by the Romans. According to Josephus this Theudas revolted under Emperor Claudius, ca. 45 A. D., while Gamaliel speaks of a Theudas living prior to the "days of the taxing," v. 37. This is not a historical inaccuracy on the part of Luke, as some critics hold, but Luke and Josephus quite evidently speak of two different men, both rebelling, both having the same name, but both living decades apart. The Theudas of Luke succeeded in gathering only four hundred men, which is a long way from "the greater part of the people," who followed the Theudas of Josephus. Theudas undoubtedly was one of the leaders in the ten thousand disorders of which Josephus speaks, and it is not surprising that he is not named by Josephus, who does not even mention Hillel and Gamaliel, although they were men of far greater fame than an obscure leader of four hundred dissatisfied people. Theudas rose up, proudly claiming that he was "somebody," a prophet perhaps or a special messenger of God. He succeeded in gathering about himself four hundred people, only to meet with an



untimely end. He was slain, his band scattered, the "somebody" brought to naught. At some later time, in the days of the taxing, ca. 6 or 7 A. D., Judas of Galilee (whom Josephus once calls the Gaulonite, perhaps because Gaulon [Golan] was his birthplace, and more frequently Judas the Galilean, because Galilee was the seat of his activity) drew away much people after him, *κavón*, sufficient, many, enough to cause serious disturbance. While Theudas seems to have been only a petty chief, the revolt of Judas undoubtedly assumed more dangerous proportions. Josephus tells us that even after his death and the scattering of his followers they again banded together and under the leadership of his sons again rebelled some years later, until the three sons were slain by the Romans. But whether the disorder was of nation-wide extent or embraced only a few followers, both leaders were slain, their followers scattered, dispersed; both movements came to naught. The underlying reason, though not here expressed by Gamaliel, is of course, in his opinion the godless character of the leaders and the ungodly spirit of rebellion which motivated the people.

Acts 5:38, 39: *And 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; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.* Gamaliel sees that the waves of excited fanaticism no longer are running so high. The Sadducees are listening attentively. The time is ripe to make the application. "And now," *καὶ τὰ νῦν*, with respect to the present situation, "I tell you, Refrain from these men," withdraw from them, cease to vex them (cp. Luke 4:23; Acts 22:29), "and let them alone." The best manuscripts have *ἀφετε*, send them away, dismiss them, do not hinder them. Other manuscripts read *ἐλάσατε*, the word that Jesus uses Luke 22:51, do not restrain them, put nothing in their way. "For if this counsel or this work" — the *or* does not distinguish two different objects, but two different names for the same object. If this counsel, this project, or call it this work (since it has passed beyond the stage of a mere plan), "is of men," — *ἐξ* denotes the origin, — proceeds from men, is devised and set into motion by men, "it will come to naught," will be dissolved from top to bottom, completely destroyed, utterly overthrown. On the other hand, "if it be of God," if God has planned this counsel, if God is carrying on this work, "ye can not overthrow it," or, as some manuscripts read, "them," "lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." To battle against this movement, if it should be of God, to resist and persecute and perhaps go so far as to slay these men, if they should be messengers of God, would stamp you in the opinion of all as *θεομάχοι*, battlers against God.



In the first *if* clause Gamaliel uses *ἐάν* with the subjunctive, denoting the "condition as undetermined with some expectation that it will be determined." The second *if* clause is introduced by *εἰ* with the indicative present. "The indicative states the condition as a fact. It may or may not be true in fact. . . . This is far the most common condition. It is the natural one to use, unless there is a special reason to use another. It is the condition taken at its face value without any insinuations or implications." (Robertson, *A Short Grammar*, pp. 161, 162.) From the fact that the second conditional sentence is introduced by *εἰ* with the indicative, interpreters have argued that Gamaliel was favorably inclined to Christianity or that Luke intended to imply such an inclination. Let us remember that even the conditional clause with *εἰ* and the indicative does not permit "any insinuations or implications" to be drawn as to whether the speaker regards the condition as true or not. Cp. Matt. 12:27, 28. Whether Gamaliel was inclined to Christianity or not cannot be ascertained from the form of the conditional sentence. The context tells us nothing about such a leaning toward Christ. His counsel was due to his abhorrence of intolerant bigotry and fanaticism, his natural mildness and liberality. Hence his advice to adopt a temporizing attitude, to suspend judgment, at least to refrain from severity and suppression, was not necessarily due to any sympathy for Christianity on his part but, as the *Expositor's Greek New Testament* observes, "the judgment of toleration and prudence," no more.

Gamaliel's policy of letting matters take their course, of suspending judgment until time has proved the value or worthlessness of any matter, of shaping one's opinion according to the success or failure of a movement, may at times (though by no means always) be justifiable in questions pertaining to business, politics, civic legislation, etc. His tolerance of religious tenets and doctrines differing from his own is, as far as civic legislation is concerned, the correct one, the only one in keeping with the principles laid down by Christ and His apostles in the New Testament. His effort to preserve peace and harmony within a community by making compromises, by relinquishing some rights and privileges in the interest of the public welfare, is a praiseworthy one so long as no moral obligation is violated. Yet there can be no doubt that his advice under the circumstances prevailing at that time is far from correct, far from being pleasing to God, far from promoting the welfare of his fellow-men and of the Church of God.

The question at issue at that council was not whether in a state constituted as modern states are religious toleration and liberty of worship was to be granted, compromises for the sake of peace could be permitted. The commonwealth of Israel had a unique form of government. It was a theocracy. God Himself



was the King, the Legislator, the Ruler Supreme, His Law the norm for all actions, for all judicial decisions. In this commonwealth, toleration of error was forbidden on penalty of death (Deut. 13:1-18; 18:20), even as false doctrine is forbidden upon pain of excommunication in the Church of the New Testament. And the doctrine which the apostles were preaching, for which they had been summoned before the Council by the high priest, did not concern some obscure point not clearly revealed, on which there might be a difference of opinion. It affected the very heart of the religion of Israel. Is Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah promised by God? That was the question at issue. This question was answered by the apostles with an unequivocal yes and by the Sadducees with just as decided a no. Gamaliel's advice was to be non-committal. If the apostles were right, then the Sadducees must accept Jesus as their Messiah or cease to be true Israelites. If the Sadducees were right, then the apostles must be put to death as dangerous perverters of the people. Gamaliel's advice was, Do nothing; bide your time; wait for results. This was not an issue on which there could be any reasonable doubt, in which the facts were hard to determine. The facts were clear; the facts were overwhelmingly proving the truth of the apostolic message. It was a fact that in the name of this Jesus that man lame from his mother's womb had been instantly healed (Acts 3:1-11; cp. 4:14-17) and that daily innumerable miracles were being performed in the very city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:43; 5:12-16). It was a fact that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled Scripture, as the apostles preached (2:16-36; 3:22-26; 4:10, 11). Not once do we hear of an effort on the part of the enemies to disprove the Scriptural arguments advanced by the apostles. Above all, it was a fact that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified, dead, buried; they themselves had sealed the stone and set a watch to guard the grave. It was a fact that this selfsame Jesus had risen. The grave was empty. The enemies could not deny this fact. After their first attempt to discredit the resurrection by bribing the soldiers to spread a lie, not once did the enemies charge the apostles with preaching a falsehood. They simply forbade the preaching of the name of Jesus either without stating any reason or, in the only instance in which they gave a reason, they betrayed their evil conscience, their refusal to accept Jesus in spite of better knowledge by imputing to the apostles the intention of bringing this man's blood upon them, Acts 5:28. Peter was justified in charging them with rejecting not merely the well-established witness of the apostles but that of the Holy Ghost and with refusing to obey God, as else they would have received His gift, the Holy Ghost 5:32. And Gamaliel? He calmly tells his colleagues, Wait; lie low; stand by;



do not do anything. When the Pharisees approached Jesus with the request for a special sign, He answered: Matt. 12:39-42; cp. 16:1-4. What would Jesus have answered Gamaliel? We may read the answer Luke 11:23.

What a difference between the attitude of Gamaliel and that of the apostles! On the part of Peter and his fellow-apostles there is no equivocation, no halting between two opinions, no uncertainty, no waiting for more signs, no looking for success before one takes sides for or against Jesus. Listen to their clear-cut, courageous, positive statements, 2:14 ff.; 3:12 ff; 4:8-13. Every word breathes assurance, willingness to take the consequences of their testimony, be they what they may. What a refreshing contrast to the weak, vacillating policy of Gamaliel!

Gamaliel's advice under the circumstances that prevailed was also both illogical and at variance with the facts of history. It was an unwarranted generalization to base a general principle on two incidents, the more unwarranted since there are as many facts disproving his conclusion as affirming it. How often did the counsel of man succeed even if it ran counter to the will of God! Did Gamaliel never read Job 21:7-15; Jer. 12:1, 2; Ps. 73:3-12? Is Romanism of God or Freemasonry or Mohammedanism or Buddhism or sin or Satan? Have they not been eminently successful? Shall we wait until any one of them or all of them shall have been brought to naught before deciding against all or any of them? On the other hand, how often are the works of God destroyed by the wicked machinations of men and Satan! Where is the divinely created state of perfection? Where is Eden? Where is Jerusalem, the city of God? Where is the Temple, the house of Jehovah? Where is Israel, God's own chosen nation? Where are the churches of Asia Minor, of Northern Africa? Shall we wait until Christ shall have put down and utterly abolished all rule and all authority and power rising up against Him (1 Cor. 15:24; cp. Eph. 1:21) before deciding for Him? Will not the decision come too late? Will not Christ then tell us: Matt. 7:23? This life, today, this fleeting now, is the time for decision. Ten years hence, next year, tomorrow, may be too late. Procrastination is not only the thief of time, but it will steal things even more valuable than time; it will rob us of our Christ, our God, our salvation. In advocating suspension of judgment in this important matter, Gamaliel proved that his usually brilliant mind was blinded by Satan in matters pertaining to the way of life.

Gamaliel's advice did not remedy matters. It did not do justice to the apostles. Or was it right to mention them in the same line with such men as Theudas and Judas? It did not change the enmity of the Sadducees against the apostles. It rather hardened them in their unbelief. It did not benefit his own spiritual life, but



his refusal to take action for the apostles, his compromising attitude, led him deeper into sin, as we shall see.

By his diplomatic handling of a difficult situation, by his suave manner, by his tactful speech, Gamaliel succeeded in persuading the Sadducees to follow his advice. *And to him they agreed*, literally, were persuaded, listened to him, yielded to him. He had gained his point, at least as far as frustrating their determination to slay the apostles. Yet his victory was not a complete one. It was in the nature of a compromise. They were willing to let the prisoners go but not without some form of punishment because of their flagrant transgression of the commandment not to preach in the name of Jesus. Yet for the time being they were agreed on their mode of action. The danger of dissension and strife in the presence of the apostles having been eliminated, they called the apostles and beat them. The Jewish law forbade to give more than forty stripes with the lash or rod, Deut. 25:3. Fear to exceed this number caused them to cease at thirty-nine stripes, 2 Cor. 11:24. The word translated "beat" is used of the slapping of Jesus by the servant of the high priest, of the beating Jesus suffered from the Roman soldiers, Luke 22:63. Paul uses the word to describe the punishment inflicted upon himself by the Philippian authorities, Acts 16:37 (cp. vv. 22, 23), and in 22:19 of his own maltreatment of the Christians; cp. 9:1; 26:11. It was a very painful form of punishment, and undoubtedly the literal meaning of the word, to flay, to skin, was often descriptive of what happened: the skin of the poor victim was broken and torn off in large portions.

Having wreaked their vengeance on the innocent, helpless prisoners, the Sadducees repeat their commandment that the apostles *should not speak in the name of Jesus*. Compare the similar prohibition in 4:17, 18. "In the name," ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι, upon the authority of Jesus. Their opposition is directed against the authority of that Jesus of Nazareth whom they hated during His lifetime, whom they crucified, whose grave they sealed. Even though they cannot deny His resurrection, they would not have this Man to reign over them, Luke 19:14; 20:1-19. To this day one of the chief causes of enmity against Christ and His Gospel is the refusal to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (1 Cor. 10:5), the unwillingness of man to bow to a superior authority, to make Christ's Word the rule and norm of one's life. Reason, science, power, money, anything connected with man and his achievements, will be acknowledged as authorities, but Jesus? His Bible, that unscientific book? Never! Power may dictate, science may decree, money may command, and man will submit, but bow to Jesus? Where is His letter of authority? Who gave Him the right to rule over us? What has He to do with us and we with Him?



The Council finally *let them go, set them free*. To this extent Gamaliel's policy of moderation had prevailed. Yet the Sadducees had not given their consent to their liberation without having punished them severely and again forbidden them to preach in the name of Jesus. And Gamaliel? Unlike Nicodemus, John 7:50 ff., and Joseph, Luke 23:50 ff., he apparently connived at this injustice, consented to this procedure so utterly at variance with Jewish law, whether the apostles were guilty, Deut. 13, or innocent, Ex. 23:7; Ps. 94:20, 21. His was a sinful compromise, whereby he himself became guilty of that very sin against which he had warned his colleagues, of fighting against God. What success Gamaliel actually achieved in stopping the murder of the apostles, in persuading the Sadducees to a policy of moderation, was only temporary. Only a few months later Stephen breathed his last under the stones of the executioners, having been condemned to death by this same Council and its high priest, Acts 7. A persecution arose which scattered the Christian congregation, so that of all the many thousands of Christians only the apostles remained in Jerusalem, 8:1. And Saul was encouraged and supported in his mad ravings against the Christian congregation by the high priest, Acts 9:1, 2. Gamaliel's "success" was a short-lived one.

Yet the Lord of the Church used this man Gamaliel, to whom Christ Crucified was a stumbling-block and foolishness, to prevent the untimely murder of the apostles. Not yet were the witnesses of His resurrection to be killed. Not yet was the Church, still in its infancy, to be deprived of its infallible teachers and guides. Though the blood of Christians began to flow in the near future, yet it was not until about ten years later that James was to be beheaded as the first martyr among the apostles. The Lord rules in the midst of His enemies. Not only does He bring many of their schemes to naught, but He also so rules their wicked counsels that even they must work together for good to them whom He has chosen from eternity to be His own.

V. 41: *And they departed from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.* "They departed"—the imperfect vividly presents the whole scene before our eyes. We see them setting out on their way, see them slowly passing by the members of the Council, their backs bruised and sore, their clothes soiled by the blood still oozing from the open wounds. Slowly, painfully, they pass out of the presence of the Council. Yet their entire demeanor proves the injustice of comparing these men with such rebels and murderers as Theudas and Judas. They do not curse the Council; they do not heap maledictions upon their unjust, cruel judges. Nor do they stoically suffer their fate, silently submitting to something that can-



not be changed. Luke tells us that they departed rejoicing. The order of the words, "they now departed rejoicing from the presence of the Council," indicates that they did not wait with their rejoicing until they were at home and until they had their wounds dressed. No; in the presence of the Council, while they went forth, in the audience of their judges, they voiced their joy and exultation. Their departure was not the slinking away of criminals but a triumphant procession as of victors, as of people that have just been highly honored, decorated with badges of merit. They went forth "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." The purpose of the Council had been to dishonor, to shame them; they regarded this disgrace as an honorable distinction conferred upon them, every cut of the lash inflicted by their tormentors as a service-stripe granted to them by their heavenly King, every bruise a medal of honor; for did not their Savior tell them Matt. 5:11, 12? In obedience to His commandment and strengthened by His Spirit, they were able to rejoice where others would see occasion only for weeping and lamenting. Cp. Acts 16:25; Rom. 5:3.

The apostles went forth from the presence of the Council, the peace of God in their soul, songs of rejoicing upon their lips. They left behind a Council perplexed, beset by ever-increasing doubts "whereunto this would grow," v. 24, tormented by anxious forebodings, an unhappy company, because they had refused to accept the peace and joy prepared for them also by that selfsame Jesus of Nazareth whom the apostles preached, whom they, however, rejected. Cp. Is. 57:19-21.

V. 42: *And daily in the Temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.* "They ceased not." The imperfect again pictures to us the apostles as day by day they stopped not "being preaching ones and proclaiming as good news" Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. Their teaching activity had been interrupted by their imprisonment, but no sooner had they been set free than their work of testifying of Jesus as the Christ continued. Twice they had been forbidden to speak in the authority of Christ, 4:18; 5:40, three times imprisoned, 4:3; 5:18, 26; they had been whipped. Yet in spite of it all they obeyed their Christ, their Lord and God, more than man. He had told them: Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 5:19, 20. Who were men that they should forbid when God had commanded? In the Temple, where daily the multitudes came together, in the sight and in the hearing of their malicious enemies, they publicly proclaimed doctrines forbidden by the authorities of the Temple, because He who is more than the Temple, the true Lord of this house of God, had told them to be His witnesses. In every house, from house to house, they carried



the glad tidings of great joy entrusted to them and thus continued to fill Jerusalem with the Gospel, the savor of life unto life unto them that are saved, the savor of death unto death unto such as the Sadducees, such as would not believe. With such bold witnesses, is it surprising that the Church grew so rapidly? Here is one of the answers to the question, Why has the preaching of Christ Crucified seemingly lost its power in our day? Rom. 10:14, 15. We cannot refrain from quoting a paragraph from Lenski's homiletical hints on this Epistle: "What did the apostles do when they suffered such unjust and shameful treatment at the hands of the High Council? Did they call a great mass-meeting that very night of all the people and protest in the name of liberty, justice, and human rights against the treatment they had received, draw up a ringing appeal to Pontius Pilate for protection against any further violence of this kind and have it signed by thousands, and, to top it off, organize a society for the purpose of exposing to public criticism and scorn, injustice and wrong such as had been inflicted upon them? Hardly; the walls of Zion are not built by these modern methods of worldly procedure. The apostles joyfully preached the Gospel. That was their best answer to the stripes they had suffered." (Lenski, *Eisenach Epistle Selections*, II:52.)

As we are celebrating the centennial of the Saxon immigration, this text offers an opportunity to instruct the congregation on the nature of the work our Church is carrying on and the only God-pleasing manner in which this work is to be carried out. We have here a chapter from the history of the warfare between the powers of darkness and the King of Light. The theme: *The Raging of God's Enemies against His Church*. 1. Deep guile and great might are their dread arms in fight (Sadducees and Gamaliel). 2. The Word they still shall let remain. Christ holds the field forever. — *Christ Ruling His Church on Earth*. He stops the raving of the enemies; He enables His own to carry on His work. — *The Gospel of Christ Crucified Revealing the Thoughts of Many Hearts*. (Luke 2:35 may be used as introduction.) The thoughts of God's enemies (Sadducees, Gamaliel). The thoughts of God's children. — *How shall We Build the Church of God*. By willingly suffering persecution (not resisting force with force). By preaching the truth (not by compromises with error). — *No Neutrality or Compromise with Error in God's Church*. That is sinful. That is pernicious. (Always contrast the attitude of the apostles and of Gamaliel.) — *The Gospel Call for Decision*. 1. God's revelation is complete. 2. The lines among men are drawn. 3. Your time of grace is short. (Lenski, *Eisenach Epistle Selections*, II:73.)

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