
Signs of Life: Persistence

Acts 5:17-32

June 13, 2026

CUSTOM

<p ANNOUNCEMENTS <p

- **Second Sundays**

- Tonight at 6pm.

- **Jan Miller Memorial Service**

- Services will begin with a **visitation** held from **10:00-11:00 AM**, followed by a memorial service at **11:00 AM**.

2nd Service Only

- **Baptisms**

Intro

The book of Acts shows us what happens when the risen Christ is truly at work through His church. This is not a dead religious movement trying to preserve a memory. This is not a group of men sitting around reminiscing about better days with Jesus. This is the living Christ continuing His work through a Spirit-filled people. And everywhere the life of Christ is present, there are signs of life.

In Acts 4, the church is praying with boldness. They are not asking God to make life easier. They are asking God to make them more faithful. They are not begging God to remove every threat. They are asking Him to give them courage in the middle of the threats. That is a different kind of prayer than most of us are accustomed to praying.

In Acts 5, God purifies the church through the sobering account of Ananias and Sapphira. Then immediately afterward, great power is being demonstrated through the apostles. The sick are being healed. Lives are being changed. Multitudes of men and women are being added to the Lord. There is power. There is purity. There is growth. There is movement. The gospel is transforming people through the obedience of the church.

But then comes the reminder we must not miss: when God moves, the enemy responds.

We sometimes think that fruitfulness should mean ease. We assume that if God is blessing, then opposition should decrease. But Scripture often shows us the opposite. Sometimes opposition rises precisely because the gospel is working. The enemy does not need to attack a sleeping church. He does not need to resist a silent church. He does not need to stir up opposition against a church that has already learned how to coexist peacefully with darkness. But when the church begins to preach Christ clearly, live holy, pray boldly, and reach people with the gospel, darkness responds.

So this passage shows us one of the great signs of spiritual life. Not stubbornness. Not arrogance. Not a love for controversy. Not the need to win arguments. But holy, Spirit-filled persistence. A living church persists because Christ is alive, the gospel is true, and obedience to God matters more than the approval of men.

CUSTOM

When the life of Christ is truly at work in the church, opposition may restrict the building, threaten the body, and intimidate the messenger, but it cannot imprison the truth.

MAIN POINT

The Opposition to the Truth (Acts 5:17–18)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:17–18 — "Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him, which is the sect of the Sadducees, and they were filled with indignation."

That word "indignation" carries the idea of jealousy or envy. That tells us something important about their hearts. They are not primarily grieved that the people are being deceived. They are irritated that the people are being reached. They are not looking at the lame walking and sinners being saved and asking, "What if God is doing something among us?" They are saying, "We are losing control." That is what false religion does. It is more concerned with protecting its own influence than submitting to the evidence of God's work.

These are the Sadducees. They were closely connected to the high priestly class, the temple system, and the political and religious power structures of Jerusalem. They did not believe in the resurrection. They did not believe in angels or spirits. And now the apostles are preaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ with boldness, and God is confirming that message through signs, wonders, and even angelic deliverance.

You can almost feel the irony of this passage. The men who deny resurrection are trying to silence the preaching of the resurrection. The men who deny angels are about to have their prison opened by an angel. The men who claim spiritual authority are about to be publicly exposed as powerless before the authority of God.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:18 — "And laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison."

This is not the apostles' first encounter with opposition. In Acts 4, Peter and John were already arrested and commanded not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. They answered then, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge." Now, in Acts 5, the pressure increases. The opposition becomes more aggressive. And that should not surprise us.

SCRIPTURE

John 15:18–20 — "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 3:12 — "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

The Bible never teaches us that faithfulness to Christ guarantees the absence of opposition. In fact, it teaches the opposite.

A faithful church should not be shocked when truth makes enemies. Light has always disturbed the darkness.

- This does not mean we should become paranoid. Not every hardship is persecution. Not every criticism is spiritual warfare. Sometimes people oppose us because we are unclear, unkind, immature, or unnecessarily offensive. But there is a kind of opposition that comes simply because the truth is being preached.
- The gospel, by its very nature, confronts darkness. It confronts pride. It confronts self-righteousness. It confronts false religion. It confronts the illusion that man can save himself. The gospel says something far more offensive to human pride than the world is prepared to hear. It says we are sinners. It says we are guilty before a holy God. It says we cannot rescue ourselves. It says our best works cannot cleanse us. It says Christ had to die because our condition was that serious. It says the only way to be forgiven is through repentance and faith in the crucified and risen Son of God.

That message is beautiful to the broken, but offensive to the proud. It is like a doctor telling a man he has cancer. The doctor is not unloving because he tells the truth. He is merciful. But if the patient is committed to denial, the doctor becomes the enemy. The gospel wounds our pride in order to heal our soul.

SCRIPTURE

John 3:19–20 — "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

That is what is happening in Acts 5. The light is shining, and those invested in darkness are trying to shut it down.

Here is the difference between a dead church and a living church. A dead church changes the message to avoid opposition. A living church keeps preaching Christ with humility and courage.

The goal is not to be offensive. The goal is to be faithful. But if faithfulness to Christ offends the darkness, we must not trade truth for comfort.

The apostles did not pick a fight. They preached Christ. But when the fight came, they did not run from the truth.

MAIN POINT

The Preservation of the Truth (Acts 5:19–23)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:19–20 — "But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.'"

The authorities put them in prison, but God opens the door. The leaders said, "You are done." God said, "You are not finished."

That phrase is beautiful: all the words of this life. Not some of the words. Not the safe parts. Not the religiously acceptable parts. Not the non-controversial parts. All the words of this life.

This tells us something very important about their deliverance. God did not deliver them from prison so they could avoid difficulty. He delivered them so the gospel witness would continue. The miracle was not merely for their comfort. It was for the mission.

God did not open the prison doors to make the apostles safe. He opened the prison doors to keep the gospel moving.

APPLICATION

Sometimes we misunderstand deliverance. We think it always means God is removing pressure from our lives. But in Scripture, deliverance is often connected to mission.

- God delivers Israel from Egypt, not merely so they can be free from Pharaoh, but so they can belong to Him and worship Him.
- God delivers Daniel from the lions' den, not merely so Daniel can survive, but so the pagan king will confess the greatness of Daniel's God.
- God delivers the apostles from prison, not so they can go home and recover from the trauma, but so they can go right back into the temple and preach the same message that got them arrested.

Now, we have to be careful here. This passage does not teach that God will always deliver His servants from suffering in the same way. ***Stephen will be martyred in Acts 7. James will be killed in Acts 12. Paul will be beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and eventually die for the name of Christ. So the point is not that God always opens the prison door. Sometimes He opens the door. Sometimes He gives grace inside the prison. Sometimes He allows His servant to die, and even then, the witness keeps speaking.***

But the promise is this:

QUOTE

No opposition can stop the work of God before God is finished.

God preserves His servants until their assignment is complete, and He preserves His truth long after His servants are gone.

SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 4:17–18 — "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom."

Paul was not saying he would never die. He was saying nothing could touch him outside the sovereign plan of God. That is the confidence of the believer. Not that we cannot suffer. Not that we cannot be opposed. Not that we cannot be killed. But that we cannot be removed from the hand of God before the work of God is done.

The angel opens the prison door, but the apostles still have to obey. The angel does not preach the sermon for them. He does not remove all future danger. He simply tells them to go back to the place of opposition and speak the words of life. And they do.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:21 — "And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught."

That is persistence. They do not wait a week. They do not form a committee to assess the risk. They do not say, "Let's be wise and give this time to settle down to ensure it's safe." Early in the morning, they go back to the temple and teach.

Then the scene almost becomes holy comedy. The high priest and the council gather. The religious leaders are ready to proceed. They send for the prisoners. The officers go to the prison. The doors are shut securely. The guards are standing outside. Everything looks locked down. But when they open the doors, nobody is there.

Human authority locked the doors. Divine authority opened them. The council is assembled in all its religious seriousness, ready to put the apostles on trial, while the apostles are already back in the temple preaching the very message they tried to silence.

ILLUSTRATION

This should remind us of another scene. After Jesus was crucified, the leaders wanted the tomb secured. They sealed the stone. They posted the guards. They did everything they could to make sure that grave stayed closed. But on the third day, God opened what man tried to seal. And here in Acts 5, we see a small echo of that same truth. Man can guard the door, but God holds the key.

The world may know how to lock doors, but God knows how to open them.

John Bunyan understood this truth from the inside of a prison cell. Imprisoned for preaching outside the restrictions of the established church, the opposition could limit his location but could not limit the life of the truth. Through his writing, especially *The Pilgrim's Progress*, his voice reached far beyond anything his enemies could have imagined. They could restrict the preacher, but they could not restrict the gospel.

SCRIPTURE

2 Timothy 2:9 — "I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained."

That is Acts 5. The apostles were chained. The doors were locked. The guards were posted. But the Word of God was not chained.

MAIN POINT

The Authority of the Truth (Acts 5:24–27)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:24–25 — "Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, 'Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'"

That sentence is almost the whole sermon. The men you locked up are boldly standing, and the message you banned is being preached. The place you control has become the platform for the gospel. That is the authority of the truth.

The religious leaders saw themselves as the final authority over what could or could not be taught in Israel. They had the council. They had the temple police. They had the prison. They had the threats. But they did not have ultimate authority.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28:18 — "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

That is the foundation of the Great Commission. Before Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples," He says, "All authority has been given to Me."

APPLICATION

The church does not preach because culture gives us permission. The church does not preach because the government allows it. The church does not preach because religious elites approve it. The church preaches because the risen Christ has commanded it.

The church does not need permission from lesser authorities to obey the highest authority.

The places and people and circumstances wicked human authorities want to control are actually platforms for the church to invade with love, faith, and truth.

Now, that has to be said carefully. Christians should not be rebellious people by nature. Romans 13 teaches us to respect governing authorities. First Peter 2 teaches us to honor the king. The Bible does not give Christians permission to be rude, lawless, reckless, or arrogant. But no human authority is ultimate. When human authority commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, the Christian conscience is bound to God.

That is exactly what we see here. The apostles are not being difficult for the sake of being difficult. They are not trying to build a platform around being controversial. They are simply obeying Christ. Christ told them in Acts 1:8, **"You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** The council says, "Stop speaking in this name." But Jesus says, "You shall be My witnesses." There is no confusion about which voice carries greater authority.

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:18 — Christ "is the head of the body, the church."

Ephesians 1 says God seated Christ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and put all things under His feet. That means the church belongs to Christ. Not to the state. Not to the culture. Not to religious gatekeepers. Not to public opinion. Not even to pastors or elders as though they personally own it. The church belongs to Christ. God calls the shots.

QUOTE

The church is safest when Christ is highest.

William Tyndale understood something of this. He believed the Scriptures should be available to common people in their own language. He faced fierce religious opposition, was eventually executed, and yet the truth he helped translate could not be killed. His enemies could take his life, but they could not take back the Word of God from the hands of the people.

That is the power of truth under the authority of Christ. A court may condemn a witness, but it cannot change what the witness has seen. That is what the apostles were. They were witnesses. Their job

was not to make the message safe. Their job was to make it clear. And that is still our calling.

APPLICATION

We are not authorized to edit the gospel. We are not authorized to soften the parts that embarrass us. We are not authorized to remove repentance because it sounds too harsh. We are not authorized to remove the cross because it offends human pride. We are not authorized to remove the resurrection because it offends naturalistic minds. We are not authorized to remove judgment because it unsettles modern people. We are witnesses, and a witness does not have the authority to change the testimony.

The church loses its voice the moment it forgets that it is a witness, not the author of the message.

The apostles go from locked behind prison doors to standing in the open air preaching. Why? Because they are submitted to the authority of Christ. No fear. No intimidation. No retreat. Just obedience.

MAIN POINT

Obedience to the Truth (Acts 5:28–32)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:28 — "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

Notice what they say. They do not even want to say the name of Jesus. And notice what they are not saying. They are not asking, "What if we were wrong?" They are not asking, "What if God really raised Him from the dead?" They are not asking, "What if we have sinned against the Messiah?" They are saying, "You are making us look guilty."

- They are not broken over their sin. They are bothered by exposure. And that is one of the most dangerous conditions of the human heart: when a person is more concerned about being blamed than about being forgiven.
- A proud heart does not ask, "Am I guilty?" It asks, "How do I escape the consequences of looking guilty?"
- The religious establishment was trying to escape accountability. They saw God's hand at work. They saw the healed lives. They saw the boldness. They heard the truth. But instead of repenting, they self-protected.
- And that should sober us, because obedience to the truth was required of them as much as it was required of the apostles. The apostles needed to obey by preaching. The leaders needed to obey by repenting. Both were standing before the truth. One group bowed. The other resisted.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:29 — "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Not arrogance. Not rebellion. Not disrespect. Not a desire to overthrow every authority. But settled allegiance. When man's command contradicts God's command, obedience to God is not optional. Daniel understood this when he kept praying even after the king's decree. The Hebrew midwives understood this when they feared God and refused Pharaoh's murderous command. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego understood this when they would not bow to the image, even under threat of the furnace. And the apostles understand it here.

When human authority commands disobedience to God, obedience to God becomes holy defiance.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:30–31 — "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

That is Peter's direct language again. Peter does not flatter them or pull punches regarding their guilt. He does not soften the charge. He says, "You killed Him." But Peter does not stop at their guilt. That is mercy. Peter is saying, in essence, "You are guilty, but repentance and forgiveness are available."

ILLUSTRATION

That is the beauty of the gospel. The very men who are responsible for the death of Christ are being offered forgiveness through the death of Christ. That is grace. The blood they wanted to avoid being blamed for was the very blood that could cleanse them.

The blood of Jesus is either the evidence of our guilt or the means of our forgiveness. But no one gets to remain neutral toward the cross.

Peter says God exalted Jesus to give repentance and forgiveness. That means repentance is not the enemy of grace. Repentance is a gift of grace. Sometimes people act as though calling people to repent is harsh or unloving. But Peter says the exalted Christ gives repentance and forgiveness. Repentance is not God rubbing our face in guilt. Repentance is God opening our eyes so we can stop defending the sin that is slowly killing us.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 5:32 — "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

The apostles know exactly who they are. They are witnesses, not managers of public opinion or editors of divine revelation. They aren't spiritual salesmen trying to make Jesus marketable.

Witnesses. And the Holy Spirit Himself bears witness with them. That is why they persist. They are not operating on human courage alone. They are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Holy Persistence is not sustained by personality. It is sustained by conviction, obedience, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

That matters for every one of us. Some people are naturally more bold than others. Some people are naturally confrontational. Some people are naturally quiet. But biblical boldness is not a personality type. Biblical boldness is obedience under the authority of Christ through the power of the Spirit.

The apostles had already failed before. Peter denied Jesus three times. The disciples scattered when Jesus was arrested. These were not naturally unshakable men. But now they are filled with the Spirit, convinced of the resurrection, and submitted to the authority of Christ. The same men who once ran from a servant girl are now standing before the council saying, "We ought to obey God rather than men." That is what the life of Christ does in a person.

Conclusion:

Acts 5 shows us that the living church persists. Not because the church is naturally brave. Not because Christians enjoy conflict. Not because opposition is easy. Not because suffering is pleasant. The church persists because Christ is alive, the Spirit is present, and the gospel is true.

The apostles are opposed, but they keep preaching. They are imprisoned, but they are not abandoned. They are threatened, but they are not intimidated. They are accused, but they remain witnesses.

And that brings the question to us. Are we persistent in obedience to Christ? Not merely, "Would I suffer for Jesus someday?" But, "Am I obeying Jesus today?" ***Because courage in the crisis is usually formed through obedience in the ordinary. If we will not obey Christ when it costs us comfort, why would we assume we will obey Him when it costs us freedom?*** If we will not speak the truth when it risks awkwardness, why would we assume we will speak it when it risks suffering? If we will not stand for Christ in small ways, why would we assume we will stand in greater ones?

The apostles' boldness in Acts 5 did not come from self-confidence. It came from resurrection confidence. They knew Jesus was alive. They knew the gospel was true. They knew repentance and forgiveness were available. They knew the Spirit had empowered them. They knew Christ had commanded them. So they stood.

Church, that is what we must do. We do not need to be loud to be faithful. We do not need to be obnoxious to be bold. We do not need to be angry to be courageous. But we do need to be obedient.

We need a church that loves people enough to speak the truth. A church that fears God more than man. A church that refuses to trade the gospel for comfort. A church that knows Christ is the Head, the Spirit is our power, and the Word of God is not chained.

The world does not need a church that knows how to survive quietly. It needs a church that knows how to stand faithfully.

And because Christ is alive, His church must never live as though the truth is fragile.

- So we stand.
- We speak.
- We obey.
- We persist.