

***Words and Deeds: Fighting Against God***  
***By Jason Huff***  
***June 24, 2018***  
***Psalm 107:1-15; John 15:18-21; Acts 5:15-42***

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Acts 5:15-42. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy, inerrant, infallible Word. "As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed. Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin -- the full assembly of the elders of Israel -- and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead -- whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."

Have you ever thought about just how much we fight against getting well? You know what I'm talking about if you've ever tried to give a young child medicine. They're running a fever, headache, they don't feel good, yet they'll fight you tooth and nail about taking a dose of Tylenol or something that they've engineered to taste like candy. But it's not just kids. Many of us hate to go to the doctor. We all know folks who have wound up far, far worse than they could have been because they delayed seeing a physician until they were at death's door.

Why do we put off getting better? Perhaps it's because our first memory of doctors was getting a shot. And yeah, even if they don't bother you, shots hurt. Needles look scary. And when we're six months old, we don't realize that it's far better to get immunized than to get smallpox or polio. But you think we would get past that when we're older. Yet nobody likes to admit they are sick. We worry that the cure is worse than the disease. But we fight against the very things that could make us well.

More often than we admit, it's true in the spiritual realm as well. And that's what we're going to talk about today – fighting against God, fighting against the only One who can heal us mind, body, and soul. As we walk through the passage, we'll see God's incredible power and the wisdom there is in letting God move rather than battling Him each step of the way.

Despite the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit about their gift and died on the spot, word of the incredible power of God working through the apostles spreads. The church continues to grow, and more and more people come for healing. Even the shadow of an apostle is said to heal the faithful. The Christian movement is making waves outside of Jerusalem now; news is spreading to the nearby countryside. The apostles are not faddish rabbis teaching a trend that will die out; their followers are into the tens of thousands.

And the high priest and his cohorts in the Jewish faith can't stand it. They are filled with jealousy. They are so jealous, in fact, that they arrest the disciples. There are no formal charges; they have broken no law. As the Sanhedrin says later, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name." The only thing they accuse the disciples of is disobedience to them. They argue about their responsibility for Jesus' death, but they broke all their own protocols to get Jesus crucified, trying Him in the middle of the night and condemning Him without witnesses.

Here's the first thing I want to talk about this morning: *jealousy drives most sin*. Now there are times where jealousy is appropriate. God calls Himself jealous for His people – we belong to Him, so He doesn't want our affections going to anything that isn't of Him. Husbands and wives can be legitimately jealous – not that our spouses can't have friends and do things without us and live real lives, we can be jealous for the wrong reasons – but in our wedding vows, we promise to love and honor one another, forsaking all others as rivals for our affections.

But the vast majority of the time, sin has its roots in jealousy. The high priest was not jealous for God. His cohorts were not interested in making sure that the worship of the Almighty was not being perverted. They were jealous that they were losing market share. Once, the high priest was the most respected man in Israel; his family was invited to every important function; his sons held positions of power and authority. And now these upstarts with no formal rabbinical training are getting all the attention. They saw the apostles as competitors and rivals. So they had them locked up for no good reason.

Fallen human nature is selfish; we want everything to be about us. We are jealous when we don't have everything we want because, by nature, we think the world revolves around us. So in our sinful selves, we break the laws God set down due to jealousy. We are jealous of our neighbor's boat or home or wife; we want what he's got. At a minimum, we covet those things; as we let our jealousy spread, it can lead to theft and far worse. And our culture just fuels it. It tells us that we are important and special and thus deserve to have a new car and a huge home and the latest everything.

So an examination point for us is to ask ourselves: who (and what) am I jealous of? Am I buying things I need, or am I buying things because I feel like I should have more than what God has given me? Does "everybody else" have this thing I must have? Like the Pharisees, am I jealous that someone is getting more attention than me? I have to watch myself in this too because jealousy fuels a lot of pastors. Am I jealous of bigger churches? Is it because they are teaching error, am I jealous for the Lord that He would have more followers, or am I jealous because they have nice buildings and plenty of volunteers for projects and cash to spend without counting every penny? It's good to reflect and find the truth.

Next thought, and encouraging for us: *God's plans cannot be thwarted*. The first time they arrested Peter and John, the Jewish leadership was annoyed. Now they're angry. They have every intention of stopping this Jesus thing right here and now before it gets any worse. But God has other plans. Prison doors can't keep the apostles from preaching the good news. When God wants them released, He sends an angel to them who leads them out without unlocking a single door or disturbing a single guard. God allows the manipulation of the very way things work – matter, space, and time – so that His people can spread word that Jesus has been raised from the dead and gives repentance and forgiveness.

Now our regular plans get thwarted all the time, don't they? I got a letter from Ford the other day that because of a major recall on our cars, they would pay for rental cars – and I can tell you after a couple hours on the phone, I'm still driving my same old beater. I tried to get a better deal on my Internet this week, and that didn't happen...you know the story because it's your story too, right? Much of modern life seems to be making calls and sending emails and arguing with people to do the right thing that they should have done all along. We're thwarted in plenty of other ways, too...the tickets are sold out, the dishwasher breaks down, the computer runs slow. Most of our stress comes from our best laid plans falling apart.

But here's the thing...God's plans always come to fruition. Nothing that God desires to happen doesn't come to be. *Nothing*. You can't stop God. Prison doors were no problem. Armed guards? Barely an inconvenience. God sends an angel and the apostles are out before dawn and greet the day preaching in the temple courts. We might think of the healing miracles as God working out unique processes in the scientific world He created, but here, somehow 12 guys can unlock their cell, re-lock it, then sneak past men standing directly outside? Yeah, that's a miracle that's unexplainable.

Here's the point: you can always trust that God is going to carry out His promises because nothing stops His plans. If you have placed your faith and hope in Jesus and follow Him, you can trust that Jesus has saved you because there's nothing anyone can do to stop God from keeping His word to us. No matter what of *your* plans is thwarted, *God's* plans for you can't be. He moved a sea to save His people from Egypt; God sent His own Son from heaven itself to save us; He will not be kept from doing what He has said in our lives.

It doesn't mean that things will go the way we like. As we'll see in the upcoming weeks in Acts, things get dangerous for the church pretty quickly. Even the apostles are not immune; one will even die in the early days of the church. But that was part of God's plan too. The thing is, even death does not stop God's plans because He has plans for us that go beyond death. That's why Jesus came!

It is easy to think that when we are sick and struggling, when times are tough, when we are hurt and hurting, that God has forgotten about us, that we are outside His plans, or God can't actually help us. None of those things are true. We don't understand God's ways, and He doesn't operate as sometimes we wish He would. But if prison bars and armed men can't stop God from having His people praise His name in the streets, your circumstances are not too difficult for Him to handle.

It's good for us to start asking, "Am I seeking God's will for my life?" Because sometimes the thwarting that happens in our lives is because we really are just being self-centered and demanding God do what we want. And sometimes, our plans are thwarted because God has something better for us in mind that He will lead us into at the proper time. I can tell you that had CrossWay moved into the first property we spotted, we'd have gone bankrupt years ago and had to dissolve. God thwarted that plan to lead us where we are today. Now we need to make sure we are following His will to make Him known so that we can remain a light in Macomb and Chesterfield and New Baltimore.

Moving on...so the apostles are in the temple courts preaching, and the Sanhedrin is furious enough to kill them on the spot. But Gamaliel, a respected elder from the Pharisees, stops them. He convinces them to let the apostles go and see what happens. His point is that a lot of crazy Jewish cults started during this period, and they all petered out once their leaders died. This one might be the same, might be different – let God sort it out. They'd seen the miracles, they'd heard the stories. If it's not from God, time will do what it always does and kill the movement off. But if it is from God, then you not only can't stop it, but you'll be fighting God if you continue to try.

Now I've heard Gamaliel's speech used as proof to secularists and atheists that Christianity is true. That's not really helpful because for reasons only God knows, He has allowed people to worship false gods and create false religions. The popularity or worldly success of a false religion doesn't mean God is behind it.

But Gamaliel is onto something. There is only one offshoot from Judaism that claims the Jewish holy book as completely true and believes in the Jewish God as presented in it – that's Christianity. The core difference between them is that Judaism does not believe the Messiah has come. Christianity believes He has come and has welcomed everyone from all nations to trust in the God of Scripture and to be saved.

But it does bring us to the final question mark for us today. If God's plans will always succeed, the question is not whether we can stop Him. The question is, *will we bless God or fight against God?* Scripture is very clear that our salvation is in God's hands alone; He predestines us; He chose us; He saves us. The faith by which we are saved is a gift from God that He plants in us. We do not fundamentally cooperate in our salvation – God's plans do not hang on our free will. God is not waiting around hoping to see if we'll be saved or not. No, God has known from the beginning, because it's His free will that puts the limits on our free will.

Yet we have constant choices as people of faith whether to go along with what God is doing or fight it. We choose whether we are going to obey without question or constantly fight Him. We choose to share our faith with our friends or hold it back. We choose if we're going to live this day in faith or let doubt and worry and fear creep in. We decide if we're going to spend time with God deliberately and patiently, or if God is going to drag us into the Kingdom kicking and screaming.

Because we are all here today, I'm going to go with the conclusion that we are here because we want to love and honor God, that we have faith and really do trust in Jesus. So our issue is not exactly the same one as the Jewish leadership. But many of us have a relationship with God more akin to the doctor we talked about earlier. We'd prefer not to spend a lot of time with Him for fear that the treatment is going to hurt – and we know that getting rid of sin is in fact painful to our old selves. We don't read the Bible because we don't understand it very well, and when we do, we realize it points out God's goodness and our weakness. We don't share Jesus because we fear the pain of losing friends or just looking like an idiot in public. And yet all of these things are fighting against God and fighting against who we were made to be.

This is not a new topic. Maybe it's one we're tired of hearing about. But I can't stop talking about it because Scripture keeps bringing it up. And maybe I bring it up because I see it in myself. I have fought against God in so many ways over my lifetime because giving up my sin, my pleasures, my selfishness, is really hard. But at my core, I also want God to be glorified in me. I want others to know Him through me. I think most of us have the same war going on inside of us. It's the war we studied in Romans last year – even the apostle Paul, who seems a little too perfect at times, knew it in his own life.

So perhaps the best way to end today is an encouraging call: God loves you. If you have faith in Jesus and have begun to follow Him, God will certainly succeed at bringing you into His Kingdom. So don't be jealous of what others have in their home or in their bank account; God has given you what you need to be His servant. Let's stop fighting Him. Instead, let's be grateful for the blessings we have and work alongside His Holy Spirit in spreading the good news across our town that Jesus is risen and we can have new life through Him.