

The Voice of Reason

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Fifty days after Easter, on the day we call Pentecost, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide His disciples and give them the power they needed to spread the Gospel. Before Pentecost, the disciples had hidden themselves, too afraid of the Jewish leaders to do anything.

But now their newfound boldness angered the Sanhedrin—the ruling council of the Jews, the ones who had put Jesus to death in the first place—and they were determined to snuff the young church's evangelistic fervor before it became an uncontrollable flame.

The Sanhedrin merely threatened the disciples at first, but that didn't work. And as their anger grew, it might have started a wave of persecution against the young church had it not been for one well-respected Pharisee on the council.

That Pharisee's story is told in Acts 5:17-42.

The whole Sanhedrin was in an uproar.

Once Jesus had been crucified,

they thought they had crushed the Galilean's cult for good.

But now, out of nowhere,

His followers had reemerged in even greater numbers than before—
and now they were doing miracles as well!

The city was full of Jews from all over the world

who had come to celebrate Passover,

and it seemed as if they all wanted to hear about Jesus.

The whole city of Jerusalem had fallen under His spell.

It was maddening!

The High Priest tried to put an end to it all

but it was a tricky situation because the disciples were so popular now
that punishing them might start a riot.

First, he had the apostles brought in for questioning

and ordered them to stop preaching and teaching...
but that didn't work.

Then they arrested the apostles and put them in jail...

but when the Council convened to deal with them,

they learned the apostles had miraculously escaped somehow
and even now, they were back preaching in the Temple!

That was the last straw.

SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE, AND QUICKLY!

So the High Priest and his officials
sent the Captain of the Temple Guard to arrest them
RIGHT NOW
and, if necessary, drag them before the Council
RIGHT NOW
before they had a chance to escape again.
And once the apostles were in custody, the High Priest demanded,
"Why are you still preaching about Jesus?
Didn't we command you to stop?"

But Peter spoke up for the apostles and said,
"We have to obey God, not you.
You may have killed Jesus to silence Him,
but God has commanded us to tell everyone about Him
and that's what we will do."

The High Priest was enraged by Peter's answer
and he knew what the Council had to do.
They would all vote to kill the disciples,
regardless of whether it started a riot or not.
The Council was too angry to consider any other course of action.

But one of the Jewish leaders saw things more clearly. His name was Gamaliel.
He was one of the most powerful members of the Council,
a respected teacher among the Pharisees
and well-liked by the people of Jerusalem.
He took command and calmly told the guards, "Take these rebels outside
until we decide what to do with them."
Then he addressed the Council:

"My friends, I remember a time not so long ago
when that fellow—Theudas, wasn't it?—gained a following.
It was something around 400 people, as I recall.
He claimed to be someone great, but then he was killed
and the whole movement just faded away.
And then there was that man Judas, also from Galilee,
who gathered a small group around the time of the last census.
But he too was killed, and his followers scattered not long afterward.

"I advise you now to think carefully before you do something you'll regret.
Perhaps these 'apostles' are no more than Theudas or Judas were;
if so, their little movement won't last.
But what if their words are true? What if they *do* speak for God?
Think carefully before you act, my brothers;
for if you are wrong, you might find yourselves fighting God Himself!"

Gamaliel's words rang true to the Sanhedrin,
so they calmed down and took his advice.
They had the apostles brought back in,
beaten with a whip, in accordance with the Law,
and warned them to stop preaching about Jesus.

Of course, the apostles didn't stop preaching.
Instead, they thanked God for the privilege of suffering for Jesus,
and the young church grew stronger each day.

God saved His church through the wisdom of a Pharisee that day,
but we owe Gamaliel much more than that.

For you see, Gamaliel taught his wisdom to many pupils...
and one of them was a young Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus.

We know him better as the Apostle Paul.