

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth

Sunday, July 26th, 2026

Rev. Gerry Gallant

Obedience Above All

Proper 12

Acts 5:17-32

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

The Lord reigns over all the earth; His kingdom shall never be shaken.

We come to worship the One whose wisdom is perfect and whose power is without limit.

He gathers His people from every generation to know Him, love Him, and serve Him.

We come with thankful hearts, trusting in His steadfast love and unfailing mercy.

Let us lift our voices to the Lord with reverence and joy.

We will worship the Lord our God with gladness, for He alone is worthy of all praise.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Almighty and everlasting God, before whom every knee will one day bow, we come this morning to lift our voices in praise. You are exalted above the nations, high above the heavens, and yet You draw near to the humble and the contrite. We adore You for Your unshakable sovereignty, for Your tender mercy, and for the wonder of Your love toward sinners like us.

Holy Spirit, come and open our hearts as we worship. Quiet every distraction, still every anxious thought, and fix our eyes upon Christ, our risen and reigning Lord. Draw us near to You now, that in this hour we might taste the joy of Your presence and leave this place changed. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

People of God know this. The Lord searches every heart and knows our secret thoughts. He knows every time that we have chosen the path of human comfort over courageous obedience, and when we have feared the opinions of others more than the holy gaze of

God, so let us turn to Him in honest repentance, knowing that He is rich in mercy and ready to forgive.

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have too often loved the approval of the world
more than Your holy commendation.
We have kept silent when we ought to have spoken,
and we have guarded our own comfort rather than Your truth.
Forgive us,
Lord, for our petty pride,
our quiet compromises, and our unbelief.
Cleanse our hearts,
renew our spirits,
and grant us the grace of true repentance,
that we may walk in newness of life through Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Beloved, if you have confessed your sin with a humble and sincere heart, you are forgiven — not because of anything you have done, but because of what Christ has already done. Receive His grace. Walk now in the freedom of the forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.**

Hymn #675: "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand;
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord;

Lead me home.

When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near,
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call;
Hold my hand lest I fall.
Take my hand, precious Lord;
Lead me home.

When the darkness appears
And the night draws near,
And the day is past and gone,
At the river I stand;
Guide my feet, hold my hand,
Take my hand, precious Lord;
Lead me home.

Responsive Reading

Psalm 46:1-11

¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

²**Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
³though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah***

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵**God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.**

⁶**The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.**

⁷The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

⁸**Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.**

⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.

¹⁰ **“Be still, and know that I am God.**

**I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”**

¹¹ **The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah***

Anthem (Music Ministry)

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Acts 5:17-32

¹⁷ But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ¹⁸ they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.” ²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ “We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.” ²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. ²⁵ And someone came and told them, “Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.” ²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

Sermon

The book of Acts is not just the history of the church it is also a story about what Jesus Christ keeps on doing from heaven, through His Holy Spirit and through His people here on earth.

The Gospel's told us what Jesus began to do and teach. Acts tells us what He continues to do and teach, even in the world right now. Every healing, every sermon, every conversion, every moment of courage in this book is proof of one thing: Christ is alive, He is on the throne, and He is building His church.

That truth matters because it is what help Christians keep on going and keep serving Christ regardless of what is happening in their own lives.

There is an old story about a Christian farmer whose barn burned to the ground one night. His neighbor ran over the next morning expecting to find him in despair.

Instead, he found the farmer standing quietly by the ashes. 'Aren't you devastated?' the neighbor asked. The farmer shook his head. 'The barn is gone,' he said, but now I can see the sunrise I never could before.'

Acts 5 is a story about a prison that could not hold what God wanted set free. The apostles are arrested. They are freed. They are arrested again. And at every turn, the light of the Gospel breaks through a little brighter. If you have ever wondered whether your circumstances could shut down what God wants to do through you, they cannot.

In Acts 3 and 4, Peter and John healed a lame beggar at the temple and preached Christ to the crowd that gathered. The religious leaders hauled them in, threatened them, and ordered them to stop speaking about Jesus. Peter and John gave a simple, bold answer: 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:19–20).

They were let go — and they kept preaching.

Now, in chapter 5, the pressure rises. A warning becomes an arrest. A private hearing becomes a trial before Israel's highest court. And what should have been a simple case of stopping some troublemakers becomes something the religious leaders cannot explain at all: a locked prison, guards standing watch, and an empty cell.

Acts 5:17-18

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.

Do you see what was driving these men to try to silence Jesus's followers. It was not a love for truth, not concern for God's honor; it was because they were filled with jealousy.

The apostles were becoming respected by the crowds who were gathering around them and the authority of the Sanhedrin was slipping away.

Their problem was not primarily about the doctrines that were being shared, instead it was something personal.

John Calvin once pointed out that envy loves to dress itself up as religious concern — people say they are defending God's honor when really, they are defending their own position. That kind of pride is dangerous precisely because it can hide behind religious language. And it is still just as prevalent in religious organizations today as it was in the Sanhedrin.

You even see the same sort of thing today in many workplaces. An insecure manager who watches a young, talented employee start to shine and then instead of celebrating it, the manager feels threatened. So, the manager starts leaving the employee out of important meetings, quietly taking credit for their ideas, and finding small mistakes to complain about.

That petty, defensive spirit is exactly the spirit of the Sadducees in this passage. They had no real interest in whether the apostles' message was true. They only cared about keeping their grip on the people and the power and prestige they had.

The Sadducees were the wealthy, powerful priestly class. They ran the temple and denied much of what the rest of Scripture taught — no resurrection, no angels, no spirits.

And here were the apostles, preaching in their own courtyard, that a man they had crucified was alive. If that was true, everything the Sadducees stood for was in trouble. So, they arrested the apostles and threw them into the public prison, a jail used for common criminals, and they meant to humiliate them in front of the crowd.

However, the apostles were exactly where God wanted them.

This is nothing new in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament; Joseph obeyed God and ended up in prison, Daniel obeyed God and ended up in the lions' den. Neither situation meant God had lost control. Often those were the very places His glory shone brightest.

Centuries later, Martin Luther was declared an outlaw after standing before the Emperor at Worms. By all human logic, his ministry should have ended right there. Instead, hidden away for his own safety, he translated the New Testament into German, one of the greatest gifts the church has ever received. What looked like his defeat became one of God's greatest tools to reach the masses. The Sanhedrin thought they had silenced the annoying preachers. In reality, they had only set the stage for God to act in the same way as he had for the disciples.

Acts 5:19-21

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the

words of this Life.’ 21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

Acts does not dwell on the miracle. It moves straight past the angel and straight to the message. Angels never seek attention for themselves. Hebrews calls them ‘ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.’

They point away from themselves and toward the Lord.

Charles Spurgeon put it well: the angel opened the door and set the preachers free; He gave the apostles their orders and stepped aside. The release was the angel’s job. The preaching belonged to the apostles.

There’s also something almost ironic going on here. The men who locked up the apostles were Sadducees, the very people who denied angels even exist.

And God sends an actual angel to undo everything they had done. As one Bible teacher put it, those who denied the supernatural were defeated by it. God is never limited by what people believe about Him. Plenty of people today dismiss miracles or deny that God is actively at work in the world, all of their unbelief doesn’t change a thing.

But look closely at why the angel let them out. He did not say, ‘Run.’ He did not say, ‘Hide.’ He did not say, ‘Get out of Jerusalem while you can.’

He said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.’

God didn’t rescue them to make their lives easier. He rescued them so they could get back to work he had called them to do.

Every gift God gives has a purpose bigger than our own comfort; we always need to remember that He saves us so that we can tell others about Him.

And the apostles didn’t hesitate. They did not debate about whether it was wise to wait a few days or whether they should find a better way.

Instead, ‘They entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.’

Most people in this situation would not have gone straight back to doing exactly what had got them arrested, humanly speaking it makes no sense, the authorities knew exactly where to look for them.

But faithfulness isn’t decided by what feels safest. It’s decided by what God has said.

This is the same conviction that the Scottish reformer John Knox had, he was a man who kept preaching Christ's authority over the church no matter who tried to silence him.

And while most of us will never face prison for our faith. We all face quieter pressures in our life, like the pressure to stay quiet about what the Bible teaches, to soften the claim that Jesus is the only way to heaven, and to keep our faith a private matter.

The apostles remind us that faithfulness sometimes means standing exactly where the world least wants us to stand and proclaiming the truth of God's Word.

And notice that lovely phrase used by the angel: 'all the words of this Life.'

Not moral advice. Not a philosophy. The words of life, because it is found in the living Christ.

Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (John 14:6).

This is what the apostles were sent to announce: that spiritually dead people can be made alive through the risen King. Before the sun was even fully up, before the Sanhedrin had settled into their seats congratulating themselves on a job well done, the apostles were already back in the temple, preaching the very message that had gotten them arrested the night before.

Acts 5:21-26

21 And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.

Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, 23 'We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside.' 24 Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. 25 And someone came and told them, 'Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.' 26 Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

This was the Sanhedrin; seventy-one of the most powerful, educated men in the nation, the highest court in Israel.

While they were gathered preparing to put God's servants on trial, God had already overturned everything.

The Court sent their officers to bring the prisoners to stand before them, and they returned empty handed.

They reported that everything looked exactly as it should, the doors were locked, the guards were still standing watch, and somehow, even though it was impossible, the prisoners were gone.

One commentator noticed a holy irony here: the men who believed they had completely controlled all of the events of the day, suddenly discovered they didn't even control their own prison.

The same way that Pharaoh thought he controlled Israel, the same way that Herod thought he could destroy the infant Jesus.

Every time people rebel against God and try to destroy His people, human power runs into limits it cannot explain.

Psalm 2 puts it, 'Why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain? ... He who sits in the heaven's laughs'. God is not laughing at human suffering, instead He is declaring that no rebellion against His rule will ever succeed.

And this confused the Sanhedrin. Which is surprising because they had all the evidence right in front of them, and they still could not come to the obvious conclusion. They could not see God at work.

Yet another reminder for each of us is that unbelief is rarely about a lack of evidence. It is almost always about the heart.

Jesus Himself said,

John 3:19

19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Miracles alone don't change a heart. It is only the Holy Spirit that can open blind eyes.

Then comes an almost comic moment. 'And someone came and told them, 'Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.'"

The apostles were not in hiding. They were not fleeing the city. They were doing exactly what got them arrested in the first place.

That kind of boldness is not recklessness; it is obedience, confidence in God rather than in themselves. Jesus had already prepared them for this with His words to them, words each of us should remember daily.

Matthew 10:28

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

So once again the Captain of the Guard and his officers go to arrest the disciples.

And notice how far the balance of power has shifted. Only weeks earlier, the disciples were hiding behind locked doors, afraid of the Jewish leaders. Now the Jewish leaders are afraid of the people. The captain doesn't drag the apostles in violently, no, this time he asks them to come, and they go without resistance, because their goal was never to avoid suffering. It was simply to stay faithful to God.

Acts 5:27-29

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.

The apostles once again stand before the same council that had condemned Jesus only weeks before, the same council who had told them to stop preaching, the same council who had them arrested already,

And that council feels the need to remind them of the charge that they had been given by the religious authorities, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.'

The high priest starts with an accusation, but then says something that unintentionally becomes high praise and recognition of their fulfillment of God's call upon them: 'You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.'

He means it as a complaint, yet in heaven it is a compliment.

The apostles had done exactly what Jesus told them to do before He ascended, they were being His witnesses in the city of Jerusalem.

What a description of a faithful church, a church that is known for filling its community with the message of Christ. I sometimes wonder, if someone described this church from the outside, would they say our community is being filled with the Gospel?

Notice, too, that the high priest still cannot even bring himself to say the name 'Jesus.'

He calls Him 'this man.' The consciences of the religious leaders are clearly troubled. Do you remember what they had cried out before the crucifixion when Pontious Pilate had confronted them?

Matthew 27:24-25

24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25 And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

Now, a few weeks later, they want nothing to do with that blood.

The reality is that this is how Sin often works: people defend themselves and their sin loudly and boldly until their conscience starts to wake up, and then they look for someone else to blame.

We also need to be cautious here.

This passage has sometimes been twisted and used to stir up hostility towards the Jewish people as a whole.

This is not what the text is teaching.

The conflict that is occurring here is with particular leaders, the apostles themselves were Jews, the early church was almost entirely Jewish and there were even Sadducees and Pharisees who had joined that church.

The guilt exposed in this passage is not the guilt of an ethnic group. It is the guilt of every human heart, including yours and mine.

It is our sin that put Christ on the cross just as surely as it was theirs. This text is meant to humble everyone, not to allow someone to point a finger outward and away from themselves.

Then Peter gives one of the most important answers in the whole Bible, another phrase that should be emblazoned on the arch of every door that leads into a church as a reminder for all who attend:

'We must obey God rather than men.'

The word translated 'must' carries the sense of necessity, it is not 'we would rather,' it is 'we have no other choice.'

When God's command and a human command collide, the Christian's duty is clear.

However, this is not a license to ignore any laws of the land we happen to dislike.

The New Testament repeatedly tells believers to respect the authorities God has placed over us, even when we disagree with it, we are called to respect and honor them, something which many people could use a firm reminder of in today's political climate.

Paul writes in Romans 13 that governing authorities are appointed by God. Peter himself writes,

1 Peter 2:13-14

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

Christians should always be the most exemplary citizens in the room. But there is one clear boundary in their obedience to the laws of the land, when a human authority commands that which God forbids, or forbids that which God commands, our obedience belongs to Christ.

John Calvin, commenting on this very verse, pushed this further than we might expect.

A father is due honor, but if he claims for himself the honor that belongs only to God, Calvin said that he is 'nothing else but a man.'

A king or a magistrate is due obedience, but if he sets himself above God's Word, his authority disappears like smoke. Calvin even applied the same rule to pastors and church leaders. No human office, civil or church, can override the plain Word of God.

This one verse has carried enormous weight through church history and is a verse to which many reformed orthodox evangelical believers still stand on today.

The Heidelberg Catechism, Luther's Catechism, and the Westminster Catechism all lean upon it. Then you have the Magdeburg confession, the Manhattan Declaration, and perhaps the best known the Barmen Declaration of 1934, in which German Christians resisting Nazi ideology confessed that no state has the right to claim total authority over human life.

Faithful believers have always stood before human leaders when threatened and firmly sided with God. From Moses who stood before Pharaoh in the Old Testament to Jan Hus the man who inspired the reformers and was burned at the stake because he refused to obey the pope, to Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox, men who stood by the Word of God and refused to be intimidated even though their lives were threatened, and many others in between and still today. This single line of Scripture has consistently given courage to believers caught between earthly power and the claims of God.

As I have said before. most of us will probably never stand before a court because of our faith.

But the truth behind it reaches into your lives each and every day.

It appears in the life of an employee who is pressured to falsify a report or cut an ethical corner, and who has to say, 'I can't do that — I must obey God rather than men.'

It appears in the life of a student sitting in a classroom, facing pressure and mockery for holding to what the Bible teaches about life, creation, or marriage.

It appears in the life of parents who are told they are old-fashioned or worse for raising their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, and who hold the line anyway.

The question in Acts 5 is the same question for every generation: Who is Lord in your life?

Not just here, on a Sunday morning, but Monday thru Saturday, at work, at school, when you are out and about and when you are at home!

Who is the Lord to you, because we know who He is to the apostles.

Peter could have stopped after making his point about authority. Instead, he does what faithful Christians always do when given the chance: he preaches Christ.

Acts 5:30-32

30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.'

In one sentence, he shows two verdicts. Man condemned Jesus. God vindicated Him.

The Sanhedrin's council pronounced Him guilty and God pronounced Him righteous by raising Him from the dead.

Peter starts with 'the God of our fathers' on purpose, Christianity is not a brand-new religion, it's the fulfilment of God's ancient promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets.

Then Peter names their guilt plainly: 'whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.'

He uses the word 'tree' intentionally. It points back to Deuteronomy 21, where a man hung on a tree was considered under God's curse.

Jesus bore that curse, for every one of us, not for His own sin, since He had none, but for ours. The sinless One took the judgment that we deserved. That is what the Reformers call the doctrine of substitution, and it sits at the very center of Christian faith.

Peter then continues, 'God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.'

The word translated 'Leader' means something like pioneer, prince, or trailblazer, He is the one who goes ahead of His people and leads them into life.

Peter had already used this word once before, calling Jesus 'the Author of life' (Acts 3:15). He is not one leader among many. He is the one and only sovereign Prince who rules His church and directs history and He is our Saviour; the Scripture never separates the two.

The Christ who forgives sinners is the same Christ who rules over their lives.

And there is once again that important reminder; first comes true repentance, then forgiveness. And that repentance itself is described as a gift.

Peter doesn't say sinners somehow come upon the idea of repentance on their own.

He says Christ gives it to them.

Sinners will always remain sinners oblivious of their own sins until they fully give themselves over to Christ. This is why so many people outside the church will fight you saying that their sin of choice is not a sin, and unfortunately, since many denominations, churches, pastors and congregations are more concerned with being loved by the people that faithfully declaring the Word of God, there are many people within the church body who will gladly tell you that their sin of choice is not a sin.

Yet even if they believe that their sin is not a sin, it does not remove their responsibility to repent, every person who has lived, is alive right now and will ever live, is commanded to turn to God.

And eternal salvation rests not upon our interpretation of God's Word, or our feelings about God, it rests on His truth, His Righteousness, His Holiness, His Mercy and His Grace.

And this means that when someone truly comes to repentance, it is because the Holy Spirit has opened their blind eyes and softened a hard heart, exactly as Paul describes in Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Here is an easy way to help you understand why living in disobedience to God's Word is so dangerous and why true repentance is so necessary.

Imagine a king whose crown has been challenged by a group of rebels in his land. They fight battles against one another for years and finally the king captures the rebel leaders.

By any fair law, they deserve execution for their treachery and treason.

If he just pardons them and sends them back to the land, he will be at war with them again in a few years.

However, what if instead the king could do something truly remarkable?

What if he doesn't just pardon them and send them back to their old loyalties,

What if instead, he gives them new hearts, so that they come to love the king they once hated, and only after that love is shown in the way that they choose to live he wipes their record clean and welcomes them into his own family.

That is exactly what Christ does. He gives us the changed heart of repentance, and He gives us the clean record of forgiveness; two distinct gifts, and neither one alone would be enough to save us.

Do you understand now, why continuing to live in sin without acknowledging that sin is such a danger, because it means that we have not truly given ourselves over to the King of Kings and therefore we have not truly repented and received our pardon!

It is also worth being clear about one more thing.

When the Scripture says the Holy Spirit is given 'to those who obey him,' he is not teaching that we earn the Holy Spirit through good behavior.

The whole message of Acts makes that impossible salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Peter is simply describing what real faith looks like. We don't obey in order to receive the Holy Spirit. We obey because the Holy Spirit has already given us new life. True faith and true obedience always travel together.

And then take careful notice the grace and mercy of God.

Forgiveness is being offered to the very men who had Jesus killed. If Christ can offer repentance and forgiveness to the high priest and the Sanhedrin who orchestrated His death, then no sinner, no matter how bad their sin may be is beyond His reach.

It doesn't matter what you've done, where you've been, or how far you've run. The Prince and Saviour still gives repentance and forgiveness to those who are His.

Then the apostles remind the Sanhedrin that they are not rumors. They had seen the risen Christ with their own eyes, they were witnesses. But their words were not the only witness; the Holy Spirit Himself was confirming their message, then and still today.

Our confidence as Christians should never rest in our own ability to persuade people. It rests on the power of God, who works through His Word.

Acts chapter 5 leaves us with one overwhelming truth: the Gospel cannot be stopped.

Look at the facts; the Sanhedrin is gone, the Roman Empire has fallen, and Caesar's throne has long since crumbled into dust.

The temple that once dominated Jerusalem was destroyed within a generation. But the church of Jesus Christ still gathers every Lord's Day, all around the world, even in places where it is outlawed. In the world today, the Gospel is still preached, and sinners are still being saved.

Christ is still building His church, exactly as He promised.

The enemies of Christ thought they had won when they nailed Him to the cross. They thought they had won when they sealed His tomb. They thought they had won when they locked the apostles in prison.

But every apparent victory of darkness became another stage on which God displayed His triumph. The cross became the means of our salvation. The tomb became proof of His resurrection. The prison became another pulpit from which the Gospel went out.

That's because the church of Jesus Christ doesn't belong to us. It belongs to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps today you feel surrounded by opposition, discouraged by the direction of our culture, wondering whether faithful, Biblical Christianity even has a future.

Acts chapter 5 answers that fear. Christ is not losing His kingdom; He is still building it. Our job is not to calculate the odds and try to figure out how to get people to come to faith.

Our job is to obey, just like the apostles, we are called to stand on God's Word where God has placed us, to speak all the words of this Life, and to trust the results entirely to the sovereign Lord who reigns over every earthly power, every empire, and every prison that has ever tried to hold Him back.

May God grant us the courage of the apostles, the faithfulness of the early church, and above all, an unwavering confidence in our risen Prince and Saviour as we walk as the Salt and Light of His Word in this dark and broken world.

Let us pray,

Almighty God and heavenly Father, we confess that we are slow to trust You and quick to fear what men can do to us. Teach us, we pray, that our times are not in the hands of

rulers or circumstance, but in Yours alone. Grant us the courage that does not come from ourselves but is granted by Your Spirit, that we may stand firm wherever You have placed us, unmoved by threat and unashamed of Your gospel.

Bind our consciences to Your Word alone, and to no other authority, that we may render to earthly powers what is rightly theirs, while reserving to You, our only Sovereign, the worship and obedience that belong to You alone. Keep us from cowardice on the one hand and from pride on the other, that in humility and boldness together we might walk faithfully all our days, to the praise of Your glory. **Amen.**

Adapted from John Calvin

Invitation to Offering

Offering Prayer

Closing Hymn #671: "I Heard the Voice on Jesus Say"

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'Come un to me and rest;
 lay down, thou weary one, lay down
 thy head upon my breast!'
 I came to Jesus as I was,
 weary and worn and sad;
 I found in him a resting place,
 and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'Behold, I freely give
 the living water; thirsty one,
 stoop down, and drink and live!'
 I came to Jesus, and I drank
 of that lifegiving stream;
 my thirst was quenched, my soul revived
 and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 'I am this dark world's light;
 look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
 and all thy day be bright?'

I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I'll walk
till traveling days are done.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious Father,
we thank You for gathering us together this day as Your people.
Thank You for Your Word,
for Your Spirit at work among us,
and for the fellowship we share as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, we lift up the needs of this congregation
comfort those who are weary,
heal those who are sick,
provide for those in want,
and draw near to any who feel alone.
Strengthen marriages, guard our children and youth,
and give wisdom to those who lead in our homes, our church, and our community.
Where there is conflict, bring peace.
Where there is doubt, give assurance.
Where there is sorrow, grant Your comfort that surpasses understanding.

As we now move from this place of worship to the fellowship that follows,
we ask Your blessing over that time as well.
Let our conversations be seasoned with grace,
our laughter be genuine,
and our care for one another be real.
May newcomers feel welcomed,
may the lonely find friendship,
and may You be honored in every table and every conversation.
Bind our hearts together in love,
that the watching world would know we belong to You.

We pray all of this in the strong and worthy name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

Benediction

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely,
and may He strengthen your hearts to abound in faith, hope, and love.
Go into the week ahead with confidence in the Lord,
serving Him with humility and gladness,
until we gather again to worship His holy name.
And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with
you and remain with you always.
Amen.