

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 370  
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8  
Verses: Acts 5:21-33  
Topic: Murderous Hearts  
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Acts 5:21-33 ISV After they heard this, they went into the temple at daybreak and began to teach. The high priest and those who were with him arrived, called the Council and all the elders of Israel together, and sent word to the prison to have the men brought in. (22) When the temple police got there, they did not find them in the prison. They came back 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) When the commander of the temple guards and the high priests heard these words, they were utterly at a loss as to what could have happened to them. (25) Then someone came and told them, "Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" (26) So the commander of the temple guards went with his men to bring them back without force, because they were afraid of being stoned to death by the people. (27) When they brought them back, they made them stand before the Council, and the high priest began to question them. (28) He said, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in his name, didn't we? Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man's blood on us!" (29) But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. (30) The God of our ancestors raised Jesus to life after you hung him on a tree and killed him. (31) God has exalted to his right hand this very man as our Leader and Savior in order to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. (32) We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who keep on obeying him." (33) When they heard this, they became furious and wanted to kill them.

If the people had ignored the gospel the Sanhedrin would not have been worried. It was the reception of the gospel by multitudes that was toppling the spiritual order of that time.

The people were glad of the miracles and the message of Life, but the Sanhedrin was angry, defensive and even became murderous. Their charge was: "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to bring this man's blood on us!" The gospel was spreading and being accepted. Peter had "filled Jerusalem" with the gospel!

Peter was so popular that the arresting officers were afraid to touch him: "...went with his men to bring them back without force, because they were afraid of being stoned to death by the people."

Their attempts to restrain the gospel prompt this reply from Peter and the other apostles: "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) This is slightly stronger than his previous "We must listen to God rather than men" (Acts 4:19) and indicates

a much stronger confrontation is taking place. By the end of this discourse the relationship will have totally broken down “they became furious and wanted to kill them.”

The apostles were asking the Sanhedrin to repent of their murder of Jesus Christ. On the other hand the Sanhedrin was determined to defend their guilty actions, - even if it meant killing more people. As we shall see this caused a split in the Sanhedrin between moderates such as Gamaliel, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and the hard-liners such as the family of Annas.

Underlying the dispute is the question of, to put it crudely, “who owns the Holy Spirit” – the religious establishment – or Jesus! At the end of the apostle’s speech there is the phrase “and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who keep on obeying him.” Now it was obvious that the members of the Sanhedrin were not doing miracles or empowered by the Holy Spirit – and it was equally obvious that the apostles were so empowered. Those who the apostles laid hands on received the Holy Ghost, but the chief priests had no such power.

If the apostles were genuinely dispensing the Holy Spirit, and by implication were obeying God, and if the Messiah had come - then the whole Levitical priesthood was out of a job! The priesthood was all about anointing – who had it, who didn’t etc. If the anointing had “moved on” – they and their whole structure, were finished. The critical notion here is of a “change of priesthood” from Aaron’s descendants to the spiritual “priesthood of Melchizedek” which we find in Psalm 110:

Psalms 110:1-4 MKJV A Psalm of David. Jehovah said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I place Your enemies as Your footstool. (2) Jehovah shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion; rule in the midst of Your enemies. (3) Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power, in holy adornment from the womb of the morning: You have the dew of Your youth. (4) Jehovah has sworn, and will not repent, You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

If Jesus had risen from the dead, ascended into Heaven and was at God’s right hand (Pslam110:1) as the apostles claimed (Acts 5:31) then the priesthood had changed – for He had taken up the priesthood of Melchizedek described in Psalm 110 above and later in Hebrews:

Hebrews 6:20 MKJV where the Forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (see all of Hebrews 7 as well)

Thus the battle is between the Aaronic priesthood (Jews) and the Melchizedek priesthood (Jesus, apostles and Christians) and the key in the tug of war was whether Jesus had risen and was at God’s right hand. Jesus at God’s right hand was such a hot topic that it got Stephen stoned to death:

Acts 7:55-58 MKJV But being full of the Holy Spirit, looking up intently into Heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (56) And he said, Behold, I see Heaven opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand

of God. (57) And crying out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears and ran on him with one accord. (58) And throwing him outside the city, they stoned him. And the witnesses laid their clothes down at the feet of a young man named Saul.

If Jesus was actually at God's right hand and pouring out the Holy Spirit, then the game was over, the priesthood had changed, they had crucified the Messiah, they were under judgment, and so on and so forth. The apostles from Galilee, the uneducated fishermen would be the future – and of course they were!

Systems do not like to change - especially religious systems 1400 years old. In the end, in spite of many miracles, the Jewish religious leaders chose death rather than life and murder rather than repentance. Let us be careful when God does new things in our midst.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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