

**"OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN."**

*– FEB. 14. – ACTS 5:17-32. –*

THE phenomenal success of the gospel under the apostles' preaching, in the power of the holy spirit, soon awakened bitter opposition on the part of the rulers of the Jews. In a previous lesson we saw that they did not hesitate to put the apostles in prison; and how they sought to convict them of crime for healing the lame man, in the name of Jesus. Their opposition, instead of dying out, increased as they perceived the wonderful strides of progress made by the new doctrine. They felt compelled to make another attempt to head off what they considered the heresy of the Nazarene.

(17,18) The two principal sects amongst the Jews at this time were the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees made loud professions of "holiness," and did much in the way of outward display, which our Lord, who could read the heart, declared was hypocrisy; while the Sadducees, better educated as a class and less orthodox, were more after the sort called "higher critics" to-day; or even beyond them, they might be termed to some extent agnostic, – their faith considerably resembling that of the "Reformed Jews" of to-day. They believed something of the divine promises, but expected them to be fulfilled in a partial manner [R2103 : page 42] and in a natural way. They evidently did not expect a supernatural Messiah. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They denied that there are angels or any spirit beings not visible to flesh and blood. The chief priest at this time, we are told by the lesson, belonged to this party. He and his sect were filled with indignation against the new doctrine, for in every sense of the word it specially opposed their teaching – much more so than it opposed Phariseeism.

The expression, "the high priest rose up," does not signify that he had been sitting or lying down and merely stood upon his feet, but

might more properly be translated "the high priest was *aroused*." He and his party, the Sadducees, had hitherto been content to very generally disdain the masses and their views, and to pay little attention to them as inferior in wisdom and judgment on such questions. But now seeing the interest being taken by the public in the apostles' preaching, which declared not only the resurrection of our Lord, but that through the merit of his sacrifice a resurrection to a future life would be provided for all, they were thoroughly "aroused." In the teachings of the apostles they were meeting with a logic which they had never encountered in arguing with the Pharisees. Accordingly they again sent and laid violent hands upon the apostles and put them into prison.

(19-23) In harmony with the other miraculous interventions of Providence at that time, for the establishment of the Church, the Lord wrought a miracle for their deliverance from prison; but instead of telling them to flee for their lives, he instructed them to go immediately again into the temple and preach as before; and this they did, going early in the morning. Great was the surprise of the General Synod or Great Council of the Jews, which had been convened for the purpose of condemning the apostles, when they learned that the prisoners were not in prison, but preaching as before in the temple.

(24-26) The officials were in consternation. It was bad enough to have men teach the gospel with such power and demonstration as they could not gainsay or resist, but to find that these men even when shut up in prison got out again by miraculous power, was enough to startle them, enough to make them consider afresh whether or not they might not be fighting against God. But they were self-willed men, not in a condition of heart to be influenced by anything, ordinary or extraordinary, which still left them their place and power. They would continue their investigation and endeavor to stop the preaching of the gospel, consequently the apostles were arrested again; but this time with great moderation, for fear of the people. The rulers were beginning to feel that an impression was being made upon the people and that in proportion as the new doctrine progressed they as teachers and rulers

fell into disrepute. Indeed, so clearly did the apostles state the matter that those who believed their teachings could not well regard their spiritual rulers in any other light than that of murderers – murderers of the Messiah, the "Prince of life."

(27,28) The language of the Council to the apostles when they were arraigned indicates that they realized the situation when they said, you evidently "intend to bring this man's blood upon us," – to make the people think that we are responsible for his death.

(29-32) The answer of the apostles shows that they were courageous men. They did not deny their preaching, nor its logical inference as understood by the rulers, for it was so. They merely said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." God sent us to preach the gospel, to tell the truth about this matter, and we have merely followed divine instructions. How beautiful, how reasonable, how consistent! There was no braggadocia in the apostles' language. They did not say, You brought us more carefully to-day than yesterday; you are getting a little afraid of the people; you have found that you cannot keep us in prison, for our Lord will deliver us; you are perhaps getting a little in awe of us by this time. They did not say, We will denounce you still more before the people and raise an insurrection and overthrow your power as sacerdotal rulers. Nothing of this kind; merely the unassuming statement, We have merely obeyed God in what we did.

Then follows another discourse similar to the one given the previous Council, explaining about Jesus, his resurrection and exaltation to divine place and power, and to be the Savior and pardon the sins of Israel. They wound up their testimony by citing them the holy spirit which operated through them as corroborating their witness respecting our Lord, his character, his resurrection, his present glory, and his power to save unto the uttermost all that come to the Father through him.

There is a valuable lesson here for all servants of God to-day. We too have a commission from the Lord to preach the gospel, and if we

would be approved and hear his "Well done, good, faithful servant," we must obey God rather than men. Should faithfulness to God bring us into conflict with the religious great ones, we are to be bold for the truth, but moderate and humble in manner and language. Children of God are never anarchists lawless; and their opposition to human arrangements must only be because moved thereto by higher, divine laws and arrangements.

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