

What To Expect When – Acts 5:12-42

Acts 5. Welcome. Livestream (9am at West). Join us. (Intro)

We're on a journey through the book of Acts, finding people just like us who were compelled. Compelled to live for Jesus, speak for Jesus, and follow Jesus. And this passage is no different. Where Luke gives us a brief summary of what life was *like* in the early church, and then recounts another run-in with the authorities. All of which clues us in to what *we* can expect given the *same* conditions. What to expect when. You follow along. V12.

[12] *Now many signs and wonders* [miracles] *were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles* [regularly]. *And they were all together* [the believers] *in Solomon's Portico* [the large outer porch, or colonnade, surrounding the temple]. [13] *None of the rest dared join them* [the unbelievers], *but the people held them in high esteem*. [14] *And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women*, [15] *so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them*. [They had such faith in the power of the Spirit to save and heal, that they went to great lengths to expose people to his presence.] [16] *The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits* [demons], *and they were all healed*.

That was *life* in the early church. And God at work. Through and through. And we can *expect* what they *experienced*. Starting with miracles.

1. When God's at work, expect miracles. (v12-16)

That's the first take-away. Expect *signs and wonders* as it says in v12. Something we don't do, because our definition of miracles is too limited. We tend to think of miracles as only those things that violate the laws of *nature*, and are visible. But they're also works of God that violate *human* nature. Invisible.

Like salvation. That's a miracle. Especially when *multitudes* are being added to the Lord (14). Because we can't save ourselves and we can't save each other. It requires an act of *God* – an act *outside* of us and above us. Which makes it a miracle.

And so is the *respect* of people who don't *believe*. Like those in v13 who held the apostles *in high esteem*. Even though their closely held beliefs were being challenged. That's not normal. In fact, it *defies* human nature.

And so does faith. Like the faith of those who laid the sick in Peter's shadow (15). So far outside the *norm* for rational people, that it can *only* be explained by an act of God.

So miracles aren't just *observable* spectacles that violate the laws of *nature*, but unseen and *unlikely* things that violate *human* nature. And when *God's* at work, we can expect them.

➤ Including miracles of healing. When a person should be sick and failing. Like some of you. Cancer was the *diagnosis* and death the *prognosis*. But here you are. Miraculous.

Does that happen *every* time? Every time someone gets sick? No. That's up to God.

Nor does it happen without modern medicine most of the time. But have you ever considered that the modern advances we enjoy and the medical knowledge we have is *part* of the miracle? Have you ever considered that God did a miraculous work in certain men and women over the centuries, enabling them to discover such things in the *first* place? Or that he does *slow* miracles as *well* as fast ones?

And what about the miracles of *prevention*, that we never know about? The things he *keeps* from happening. When God's at work, the more you expect such things, the more you'll see them.

➤ Okay, but what about miracles on *demand*? Like when Peter told the lame man to walk. "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*" And he did. It was a miracle on demand. (Acts 3:6) How come we see so many of those in the book of *Acts*, but not so many today?

Because the church was in its infancy, and God needed to corroborate the authenticity of the apostles in a hurry. Not to mention validate their message. So he gave the apostles the *ability* on some occasions to perform miracles on demand, in order to establish the church and ensure its success.

Today, the church is established. At least in *our* culture. And so is the Gospel (Bible). So the need for miracles on demand has diminished. You even see them waning in the book of Acts.

➤ But that doesn't mean they've ceased altogether. God still answers prayer, and they still occur. Not to corroborate the truth so much . . . But to encourage our hearts; and spur us on; and fuel our prayers. And certainly to give us a glimpse of what's to come, when *all* is made new and miracles are the norm. Expect it. And expect them now when God's at work.

2. When you obey, expect opposition (v17-33)

We saw this a few weeks ago in chapter 4 (v23-31), and we'll see it again in the future. Because we live in a fallen world among fallen people, who not only *reject* the truth about God, but sometimes *oppose* those who embrace it. Like we find in v17.

Things were good . . . [17] *But the high priest rose up* [the religious leader of the Jews], *and all who were with him* (that is, the party of the Sadducees [one of main factions of Judaism in those days, who held both religious and political power]), *and filled with jealousy* [18] *they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison*.

Peter and the apostles were stealing their thunder. Their influence. Their following. And they were jealous about it. *They* wanted the honor. *They* wanted the applause. So they put them in jail. If they wouldn't stop *talking*, they would keep them from being heard. In other words, they would marginalize them.

➤ And the same is true today. When you obey, when you live for Christ, expect to be **marginalized**. Pushed to the periphery. Un-friended. Ignored. That's the first kind of opposition we find here.

It happens in school with our students. It happens at work with your peers. After work with your friends. It happens in business with customers.

It happens in college with professors. And it happens in government with politicians.

When we live for Christ, obediently, we can expect to be marginalized.

➤ But take heart, because that's *never* the end of the story. V19. They put them in 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. [This good news that results in life to the full and life forever. The good life as Augustine said in the 4th century.]"* [21] *And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.*

It was a prison break. And ignoring one of the fundamental principles of criminal behavior, they returned to the scene of the "crime."

And began saying the very things for which they were arrested.

In other words, they went where God wanted, and said what God commanded, regardless of the risks. Remember that. V21b.

➤ *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 [the Sanhedrin it was called; comprised of 71 elders and religious leaders], and sent to the prison to have them brought [the apostles]. [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.*

They treaded lightly, but confronted them nonetheless. As is *always* the case when you go where God wants. Expect to be **confronted**.

That's the second kind of opposition we find here. Confrontation.

The angel told them to go back to the temple, and the result was a great big brouhaha.

Which will be the case *any* time we go where God wants in enemy territory.

Whether it's the next *cubical* over, the next school board meeting, or overseas.

When you obey God's command to go, expect to be confronted.

➤ 3rd here, expect to be **rebuked**. V27.

[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 [the name of Jesus; extolling him and pointing people to him], yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us [blaming us for his death]."*

They not only confronted them, but rebuked them. Basically saying, "What are you doing? Knock it off."

Which is more the rule than the exception when we say what God commands.

People don't *like* our firm stand. They don't *like* to feel guilty. They don't *want* to be challenged. And the response is often a rebuke.

Sometimes verbally, often times anonymously, and every now and then legally, in the form of a lawsuit. Expect it when you speak the truth.

➤ But whatever you do, don't shrink from it. We *must* not shrink back. V29.

[29] *But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.*

How awesome is that? When man's command is contrary to God's command, side with God.

And I'm not talking about what you *think* God told you to do, I'm talking about what he *already* told us to do. The instructions in his Word.

Like preaching the gospel and worshipping Jesus, living openly and gathering in church. Push comes to shove on those things, obey God.

That's what Peter did. He said it, and then did it. Speaking the very words of life they told him *not* to, to their *face*. The angel said speak it, they said don't, and he did. V30.

[30] *The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree [a cross; and there he goes again, saying it like it is]. [31] God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior [Lord and Deliverer; Way-maker and Redeemer], to give repentance to Israel [i.e. the inclination and ability to turn to him] 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."*

That's the Gospel. The word of *Life*. In 36 words. 31 in Greek. But it's all there.

Jesus died, Jesus rose, Jesus reigns, Jesus saves, Jesus forgives, and his Spirit helps.

I might *preach* that sometime. And you should too, whether it's over coffee or over a crowd.

➤ But when you do, expect to be **threatened**. Or at the very least, *feel* threatened. That's the *last* form of opposition. V33.

[33] *When they heard this [the council], they were enraged and wanted to kill them.*

I'd say that's threatening. And though yours might not be *that* extreme, you should still expect it. Like having your livelihood threatened. Or your position. Your reputation.

Because while we're the aroma of *life* to some, to those who believe and receive; we're the aroma of *death* to others. And *nobody* likes the stench of death. (**Summary**)

When you obey, expect opposition.

3. When God's behind it, expect success (v34-40)

When *God's* behind your obedience, your effort, your endeavor – expect victory. Success. V34. They were mad and going mad . . .

[34] *But a Pharisee in the council [someone in the minority, because most of them were Sadducees] named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while.*

[35] *And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. [36] For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. [37] After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who*

followed him were scattered.

[38] *So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; [39] but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!*”

We know from Acts 22:3 that Gamaliel was Paul’s teacher at the time. The Apostle Paul. And that’s probably how Luke, the author here, knew what happened behind closed doors. Gamaliel told Paul, and later on, Paul told Luke as they traveled together.

In any case, Gamaliel cites two examples of men who started insurrections and failed. And he did so, to make the case that a hands-off approach with this little movement might be best.

For if this plan or this undertaking is of man [he said in v38], *it will fail; [39] but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!*” On the losing side.

➤ When *God’s* behind your obedience, your effort, your love, your patience, your steadfastness, your delight, your commitment – expect success.
I’m not talking about the *world’s* kind of success, I’m talking about kingdom success.
I’m not talking about success that gets you ahead in *this* life, but in the next.

If it’s sharing the gospel, expect planted seeds, or new sprouts, or more growth.
If it’s tithing, expect God’s blessing. If it’s serving, expect satisfaction.
If it’s worship, expect more passion. If it’s Bible study, expect more growth.
If it’s work, expect more contentment.
Because when *God’s* wind is in your sails, things happen. Success follows.

And then last . . .

4. When you’re devoted, expect joy. (v41-42)

V39b – *So they took his advice* [the council], *[40] and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. [41] Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ* [the Messiah, the promised Savior] *is Jesus.*

What’s the attribute, or characteristic, that causes someone to feel privileged about suffering for a cause?

What causes a marathoner to keep going the last 5 miles?
What causes a mother to go without new clothes so her kids don’t have to?
What causes a dad to work two jobs to provide for his family?
What causes a soldier to run into battle?

Devotion. *Devotion* is the attribute that causes someone to feel privileged about suffering for a cause. Or in the case of the apostles, a person.

They counted themselves worthy, or privileged, to suffer such *abuse* for Jesus, because they were *devoted* to Jesus.

And that devotion led to rejoicing. Joy. *They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.*

➤ When you’re devoted – especially to the *things* of God, and the *church* of God, and the *Son* of God – expect joy.

Joy that overflows, and compels, and strengthens. Like it did for the apostles.
Who once again went right back out, and said the same things in the same spot, every single day.
Every day [v42], *in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.* That salvation is found in *him*.

Why? Because the joy they had, fed by their intense devotion, overflowed. Naturally.
And compelled them – they couldn’t *help* but share the gospel. And strengthened them – to keep on keeping on. That’s what the joy of devotion does.
It overflows, and compels, and strengthens.

➤ **Richard Wurmbrand** was a pastor in Romania at the height of Communism following WWII, and was thrown into prison for saying that . . .
Communism and Christianity were incompatible.

During which time, he spent three years in solitary confinement (**photo**), in a cell twelve feet underground, with no lights and no windows.
And no one spoke to him the entire time. Not even the guards.
In addition to that, he was so deprived of nutrition that his teeth rotted. And was burned and beaten so badly, that at one point the flesh was torn from the bottom of his feet.

And yet, there were times he said, when he was so overcome with joy – *joy* – that he would stand in the middle of his cell and dance with angels.

And then one day he was released. Just like that. So unexpected, that he literally left the prison on foot, dressed like a scarecrow, all by himself.
And on the way home, he ran into a peasant woman carrying a basket of strawberries.
And upon offering one to him, he said, “No thanks. I’m going to fast.”
And upon arriving at home, he and his wife prayed and fasted as a memorial to the joy he had experienced in prison. Asking God for the *same* kind of joy *outside* of prison.
(**Summary**)

➤ What causes someone to be joyful about suffering such abuse? Devotion. To Jesus.
And the same is true for us. When you’re devoted, expect joy.

Prayer – Oh God, find us faithful. Give us one pure and holy passion, give us one magnificent obsession, give us one glorious ambition – to know and follow hard after you.