

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**First Sunday after Trinity, June 14, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 340 244:1 528, 409:1-3, 409:4

Lessons: Isaiah 65:17-19 & 24-25; Acts 4:1-12; Matthew 5:13-16

Sermon Text: Acts 5:34-42

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our text tells us what happened in the early days of the Christian Church at Jerusalem. Those were days of intense activity for the followers of Christ, for they ***“spoke the word of God boldly,”*** Acts 4:31. As a result, they experienced much persecution. At this time the apostles were put into prison because they boldly confessed the name of Jesus Christ to others. When the Jewish religious court, the Sanhedrin, reminded the apostles that they had been told not to speak in Jesus’ name, Peter answered for all of the disciples, ***“We must obey God rather than men!”*** Acts 5:29. They then proceeded to preach to the men of the Sanhedrin about the crucified and resurrected Savior.

Was this a unique situation far removed from the realm of possibility today? No, if we confess Christ before other people we will experience persecution similar to that experienced by apostles. We may not be put into prison or be beaten with a whip as they were. But unbelievers can make life miserable for us by their mockery of our faith and their efforts to undermine the truths of the Bible.

Let us learn from our text about

**CONFESSING THE NAME OF CHRIST.**

- 1. Let us not follow Gamaliel’s advice of indecision;**
- 2. Let us follow the example of the apostles and honor Christ’s name.**

When the apostles told the Sanhedrin that it is their duty to obey God rather than men and continued to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, the Sanhedrin members became very angry and talked about killing the apostles. It was at this point that a man named Gamaliel gave his advice. ***“A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.”*** Gamaliel was a famous teacher among the Jews, a man whose opinion was respected. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the high council of the Jews, and he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a Jewish religious party organized after the Jewish 70-year exile in Babylonia. They were not concerned about the spiritual truths of the Scriptures, but they were extremely zealous in making up rules and regulations to add to the Law of Moses. They were very proud of their so-called holiness and piety and violently opposed to Jesus and his teachings of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew describes them as self-righteous hypocrites.

Gamaliel had some advice for the other members of the Sanhedrin. So he had the apostles put out of the council chambers for a time. Then he said, ***“Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.”*** He based his advice on what happened to two men in past Jewish history. ***“Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of***

*the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.”* Gamaliel was thinking that Jesus was probably just like Theudas and Judas, and that the Jesus movement would probably last only for a time now that Jesus had been killed.

Having established this basis for his advice, Gamaliel said to the Sanhedrin, ***“Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*** We call Gamaliel’s advice the advice of indecision. Be careful! Do not decide anything now! Wait and see what happens to the Jesus movement! This advice we ourselves cannot follow and we should certainly not advise anyone else to follow it.

There is a certain element of truth in what Gamaliel said. If a religion is man-made it will fail eventually. If a religion is of God, established by his Holy Word, then it cannot fail, and if we oppose it we will be found to be fighting against God himself. However, Gamaliel’s advice, fully considered, cannot be followed, and that for several reasons. First of all, how long are we to wait to see if a religion or religious movement succeeds or fails? Mohammedanism originated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Millions of people have been led astray by the prophet Mohammed and still practice this heathen religion called Islam. They worship a god they call Allah and read the Koran instead of God’s Word. For hundreds of years millions of people have practiced Hinduism in India, Shintoism in Japan, and Buddhism in eastern and central Asia. These heathen religions have not perished. Today in our own country many people have been misled to practice these and other heathen religions. Already in the early centuries after Christ the bishop of Rome began calling himself Pope, the head of Christ’s church on earth, and the Antichrist began his reign. Paul says that the Antichrist will continue until the Last Day. ***“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming,”*** 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Shall we wait until the Last Day to see if a religion is of God or man? Since no one knows when Christ will return on the Last Day, we would never be able to make a decision.

Gamaliel’s advice is not to be followed for another reason. If it were followed, that would be the same as saying that God has not given us the means to make a decision as to what is the true religion and what is not. Has not God given us his Holy Word wherein all truth is revealed? Our Lord Jesus says, ***“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,”*** John 8:31-31. The psalmist says ***“The word of the LORD is right and true,”*** Psalm 33:4. We know there are many people who pay no attention to the Bible or even fight against God’s Word. Paul says in effect, So what! ***“What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right in your words and prevail in your judging,’”*** Romans 3:3-4.

Since God has given us his Word in the Bible, and every word of the Bible is the truth of God, let us not follow Gamaliel’s advice of indecision regarding Christ and the Christian religion. Rather, let us with all diligence hear, read, and study the Word of God. Then the Holy Spirit will convince us that there is no salvation outside of Christ. ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved,”*** Acts 4:12. In learning about confessing the name of Christ, **let us follow the example of the apostles and honor Christ’s name.**

## 2.

Concerning Gamaliel’s advice, our text says, ***“His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”*** The members of the Sanhedrin only followed Gamaliel’s advice in part. Their unbelief was so great and they were so angry. Instead of waiting to see what would happen to the apostles, they had them flogged and gave them strict orders not to teach in Jesus’ name.

Our text tells us how the apostles reacted to this. ***“The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”*** This is a statement that is worthy of careful consideration on our part. The apostles were happy that they could suffer shame for the sake of Jesus. They rejoiced that God considered them worthy of suffering shame for the name of Jesus. For them, suffering for Jesus’ sake was like having a badge of honor pinned on them.

We wonder how many people today feel that way about suffering for Jesus’ sake. It’s an easy matter for us to say that we are Christians. It’s easy to belong to a large church body or congregation. It’s easy to be on the side of the majority. It calls for no sacrifices. No one calls those people narrow-minded or too strict. They can join whatever organization they choose even if the organizations teach something false. Nothing has to be given up. It’s a comfortable religion.

But this is not the way the Bible describes the Christian religion. This is not how the life of a follower of Christ is described in the Bible. Christians are not a part of the great majority. Jesus calls those who believe in him his ***“little flock,”*** Luke 12:32. The Bible does not say that in religious matters you will get along with the majority of people. It does not say that you will get along with all your relatives. Jesus says, ***“a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household,”*** Matthew 10:36. The Bible speaks of bearing a cross for Jesus’ sake, and of losing our life for Jesus’ sake. Jesus says, ***“Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,”*** Matthew 10:38-39. Paul wrote to Timothy, ***“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”*** 2 Timothy 3:12. Are we happy to suffer in order to defend a teaching of God’s Word? Do we consider it a high honor to suffer shame and ridicule if only Jesus’ name may be honored and glorified?

Suffering for Jesus’ sake should not keep us from spreading the Gospel message. We have the example of the apostles, ***“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.”*** Before this time, after Peter and John had been released from prison and told not to preach Christ, the believers prayed, ***“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness,”*** Acts 4:29. We are told, ***“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was with them all,”*** Acts 4:33. We also should pray that God give us the courage to stand up for Christ. Let us insist that Jesus’ Word be taught in its truth and purity, for that honors the name of Jesus. Let us confess the truths of salvation in Jesus’ name without any fear, no matter how many people show their resentment or their disdain for Jesus’ teachings.

We should do this because Jesus is God’s ***“one and only Son,”*** John 3:16. Remember what he did for us as our Divine Substitute. ***“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,”*** Romans 5:8. Remember, Jesus Christ ***“gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good,”*** Titus 2:14. Remember Jesus’ promise, ***“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand,”*** John 10:27-28. Remembering this, may we give honor to Jesus’ name and help spread the Gospel Word. May we do this with this conviction: Jesus is the Christ and his Word is the absolute truth. Through faith in his name we have the sure hope of eternal life in heaven. Amen.

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