

[Acts 8](#)



Leaders Note

Acts 5:17- 42 – Taking the Rough with the Smooth

Thought

Contemplating this passage again, I'm struck by the words "cut to the heart" in verse 33. It takes me back to that Pentecost crowd and Luke's description of them being "cut to the heart" and then exclaiming to this same Peter "Brothers, what shall we do?" You get the feeling that Peter wasn't even finished yet, but they couldn't wait for the invitation. They had to do something about the Message! The response here in Acts 5 by the religious power brokers of the day is just as radical, only more violent and diametrically opposed to the Message. But the point is that the Message spurs a radical response in both cases. Perhaps it's a measure of how well we are hitting the radical middle as reformers in this world. Unlike how we typically perceive the "middle" in political terms as a place of calm compromise between extremes where we just want to get along with everyone, the "radical middle" (if the term is new to you, it is a term we use in the vineyard of where we see ourselves on the church spectrum) of real kingdom living will inflame people on either side — some with passion to take up the pursuit, others with passion to shut it down and label it and us as dangerous. So live well, witness well, and be prepared for anything...

Context

Rabbi Gamaliel (from the Archaeological Study Bible): Gamaliel was one of the greatest teachers of Judaism. His grandfather, Hillel, founded the more liberal of the two main schools of the Pharisees and Gamaliel was the first of seven leaders of that school to be honoured with the title Rabban, "Our Rabbi." Paul, while making his defence on the steps of the fortress Antonia after his arrest in the temple, stated that he had been brought up in Jerusalem and under Gamaliel "thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers" (Acts 22:3). Paul, in other words, had received the best possible Jewish education of his day. Gamaliel was a man of great intellect who studied not only biblical law but also Greek literature (his love of Greek set him apart from many of his more zealous rabbinical colleagues). Gamaliel tended to be pragmatic in his interpretation of the law and was known for his tolerant attitude. He recommended the Sabbath observance be less rigorous and burdensome, regulated laws of divorce in order to protect women and urged kindness toward Gentiles. Historical records indicate Gamaliel was head of the school of Hillel from AD 9-50 and was called Ha Zaken = the elder. In Jewish tradition it is said, "When Gamaliel died, the honour of the Torah ceased, and purity and piety became extinct."

The high priest: Officially (by Roman authority) Caiaphas; but by popular opinion it was Annas (the people considered him high priest for life). Luke doesn't specify which was speaking.

The Sanhedrin: The supreme Jewish court, consisting of approximately 70 elders sitting in a semicircle, backed by three rows of disciples and with clerks of the court standing in front.

Cut to the heart: A different word from that found in Acts 2:37 (if it matters!). In Acts 2:37 the crowd listening was “pierced through.” The word here means “sawn in two” — a bit more of a violent and painful image. The same word occurs only one other time — in Acts 7 right before many of these same leaders would stone Stephen to death.

Theudas...Judas the Galilean: Josephus does mention a Theudas who led a rebellion — but places him a decade later and credits him with a much more widespread revolt. Gamaliel is undoubtedly referring to another Theudas (there were many rebellions!). Josephus also mentions Judas the Galilean stating that this Judas refused to pay tribute to Rome and thus caused a revolt in AD 6 that led to the formation of the Zealots. The Zealot revolt ultimately vanished in the Jewish War of AD 66-70 — as did the Sadducees, for that matter. We’re still here.

They had them flogged: Jewish courts generally used a whip made of leather straps (without the bone and metal added by Romans) and administered only 39 strokes (so as not to exceed 40 — in observance of Deuteronomy 25:3).



Learning Session

There are two main themes in today’s study, being a peacemaker (or having wisdom in tense circumstances) and being willing and ready to ride the tough times. Read out the passage above and talk about the context (although this can be left until after the group discussions if you like). Then pose this open question “When have you found yourself as a peacemaker in the middle of an argument? What happened?” Once you’ve discussed this briefly split up into smaller discussion groups to address the following questions.

1. Why do you think Gamaliel makes this stand for/ extends mercy to the apostles?
2. What is the apostles’ response to the public beating? How do these events affect the church in Jerusalem?
3. What do you find most challenging about this passage?
4. Do you need courage right now to face and even rejoice in the “beating” of rough times?

Come together for a time of feedback and see what folk have to say. If you have any encouraging personal stories concerning these themes share one. You can also share this quote:

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Gamaliel makes this stand for/ extends mercy to the apostles?
2. What is the apostles' response to the public beating? How do these events affect the church in Jerusalem?
3. What do you find most challenging about this passage?
4. Do you need courage right now to face and even rejoice in the "beating" of rough times?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Gamaliel makes this stand for/ extends mercy to the apostles?
2. What is the apostles' response to the public beating? How do these events affect the church in Jerusalem?
3. What do you find most challenging about this passage?
4. Do you need courage right now to face and even rejoice in the "beating" of rough times?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Gamaliel makes this stand for/ extends mercy to the apostles?
2. What is the apostles' response to the public beating? How do these events affect the church in Jerusalem?
3. What do you find most challenging about this passage?
4. Do you need courage right now to face and even rejoice in the "beating" of rough times?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Gamaliel makes this stand for/ extends mercy to the apostles?
2. What is the apostles' response to the public beating? How do these events affect the church in Jerusalem?
3. What do you find most challenging about this passage?
4. Do you need courage right now to face and even rejoice in the "beating" of rough times?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Gamaliel makes this stand for/ extends mercy to the apostles?
2. What is the apostles' response to the public beating? How do these events affect the church in Jerusalem?
3. What do you find most challenging about this passage?
4. Do you need courage right now to face and even rejoice in the "beating" of rough times?