

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

**Acts 5:12,17-33**

<sup>12</sup>Many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. With one mind, they all continued meeting in Solomon’s Colonnade.

<sup>17</sup>The high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is, the party of the Sadducees), because they were filled with envy. <sup>18</sup>They arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. <sup>19</sup>But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup>“Go, stand in the temple and keep on telling the people the whole message about this life.” <sup>21</sup>After they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began to teach.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin (that is, the whole council of elders of the people of Israel). Then they sent orders to the jail to have the apostles brought in. <sup>22</sup>But when the officers arrived, they did not find them in the prison. They returned and reported, <sup>23</sup>“We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!” <sup>24</sup>When the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were puzzled about them, wondering what could have happened.

<sup>25</sup>Then someone came and reported to them, “Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people.”

<sup>26</sup>Then the captain went with the officers and brought the apostles in without force, because they were afraid that the people might stone them. <sup>27</sup>After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin. The high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup>“Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man’s blood down on us!”

<sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles replied, “We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you arrested and killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his right hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”



It was an awful sight to see. Some 850 years of French history was on fire just a couple weeks ago. The Notre Dame cathedral billowed smoke and glowed in flame. The interior was almost entirely destroyed, the wooden roof was burned through, and the tall spire tumbled in flame. This church walls stand amid shock and debris. Victor Hugo, who wrote the great novel, “Hunchback of Notre Dame,” once called the Notre Dame cathedral a “vast symphony of stone.” Layer upon layer tells the story of art and mastery and Christianity, albeit with some medieval superstitions and misunderstandings mixed in. As devastating as the Notre Dame fire was, the stones are still there.

The lessons of Easter are a “vast symphony,” as well. It began with the promises of God and the death of His Son. But it was proved by an empty tomb of rock and a stone that was set aside. So in our Easter lessons there is a “vast symphony of stone.” We will see throughout various parts in the book of Acts how Easter began a movement, how it shaped the early Christians, and how God brings sinners into harmony with salvation. As the center of Paris is Notre Dame, so the center of our faith is where the stone was set aside.

What seemed destroyed was actually renewed on Easter day. The witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection would build on that very fact. Their faith would grow. They would band together. The dozen followers of Jesus would now grow. The **Apostles** were now **In One Accord**. Our translation says they were "*with one mind.*" What is the purpose of that phrase?

First, they had agreement in teaching. They knew what God's will was from Jesus' very lips. Plus some of them were inspired to write more words of the Bible.

Second, the character of the apostles grew up. They were performing miracles now, and people were in awe. Also, they were worshiping not in fear but at the temple, in Solomon's colonnade. They stood for something. They weren't falling for anything. They were getting into trouble! The high priest and Sadducees, a party of religious fanatics who concerned themselves with the temple, heard Jesus' name on their lips and had the disciples arrested.

One of the cleverest things about this text is how God carries out His plan and keeps the apostles "in one accord," and really puts them in harmony with His will. You see, the Sadducees did not believe in two important things: They did not believe in angels and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So when they had the apostles arrested, what did the Lord do? He sent an angel of the Lord to get them out of prison overnight. Then the angel said to go back to the temple and keep proclaiming the "*words of life,*" meaning to preach about Jesus who rose from the dead again. The apostles went back, and the high priest and Sadducees had no clue.

God does this, however, more often than we'd expect. He turns people upside-down. A man is determined to never get a job and never live in Indiana. Suddenly he needs to work and they transfer him here. A woman vows on paper to not get married and certainly never to a pastor. Sure enough, she is now a WELS pastor's wife. A vocal atheist begins to mock his next-door neighbor. Suddenly the neighbor is a pastor, the atheist is taking Bible classes, and he's realizing that he believes the words of life. The Holy Spirit is working genuine faith in his heart. God sure knows how to bring sinners into one accord.

God, who can build a world of stone and fill it with music makes a symphonic faith because of the stone that was rolled away.

So now the detective work begins. The men cannot find the prisoners. The prison guards have no idea what happened. The news gets back to the high priest that the prisoners are having a Bible study in the temple. The people are taking to the gospel. And the temple captain and his officers have to request a hearing with the apostles. What good is it to force them to come? They were jealous in the first place, what would the people do? And, we might add, another angel might bust them out of their chains again. So the enemies of the gospel wonder if the apostles might come back and make a defense before the people who threw them into prison. How embarrassing! The enemies of the gospel are a mess!

Now here is where they show their true colors. They cannot even say Jesus' name. Listen: *The high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup>"Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man's blood down on us!" "In this name" ... "this man's blood."* They won't even utter the name of Jesus Christ. Is it guilt? Is it shame? Is it disdain? Had some of these priests been present on the night Jesus was betrayed in the garden, when the mere words "I am he" knocked them onto the ground? Had some of them mocked and spit at Jesus only to hear of His resurrection appearances? Were some of them part of the command to seal the stone of the tomb only to find it rolled away mere inches from frightened Roman soldiers? Why not say "Jesus Christ"?

Then again, you see a great deal of character in the apostles response. "*We must obey God rather than men.*" Weren't these the wretched runaways who abandoned Jesus in the garden? Weren't these the confused mourners from that fateful Passover preparation day? Weren't these the huddled dozen worrying about which way out of the upper room was under watch? Now they are in one accord. Now they will not be told how to talk. Now they face the state and respect the government ... unless they are commanded to go against God's will. Now God's Word is like a fire in their belly. Now they cannot help but to speak what they have seen and heard. Now they are a symphony of gospel. And they sound out the name that the Jewish court of law cannot utter. "*Jesus, Prince, Savior.*" "*You killed Him.*" "*The God of our Fathers raised Him.*" They now knew what it was to be built on Him. It is to believe in Him. It is to share Him.

Maybe that would be difficult to do. Who here is brave enough to tell a court of law, "*We must obey God rather than you*"? Sure, I'd like to say I have that kind of courage. Maybe I don't. But I know how to get that courage. Take home some lessons from the apostles in one accord. Notice how God puts their enemies, the enemies of His very name, to shame. Notice how God works all things for the good of those who love Him, not by His strength or might or force, but by His Holy Spirit. Take courage that some brave things you might say about Jesus will have an effect. Your words may roll away a very important stone that blocks a doubting Thomas from putting His faith in the wounds of Jesus.

But if you have not been in one accord with the *Savior, Prince, Jesus*, know it without a doubt: He gives repentance. He gives you time to mull over your sins and think about how you have ignored His laws and commands. He puts His own name on your lips to ask for His help. He offers you words of life and forgiveness. He has put out the fire of hell intended for your soul, and He has raised you on stone. What greater symphony is there than salvation in Jesus? You are still standing amid shock and rubble. You are forgiven and atoned for. You are alive now and you will live again. You are in one accord with Jesus the Son of God! Take courage! Heaven is yours! Take His name on your lips! Take His gospel into all creation! Take Easter to heart, sons and daughters of the King. Take Jesus' blessing because you have not seen and yet believe. Take your cue in this symphony of stone by faith alone. Amen.