

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Series: Next!

(studies in the book of Acts)

The Logical Christian Life

(Acts 5:12-42)

Study #8

Introduction: Categorical syllogisms we have known and loved...

Lewis Carroll, the inventor of Wonderland and the author of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was a 19th century British lover of nonsense and a teacher of logic.

Among Carroll's more well-known logical formulas (known formally as *categorical syllogisms*) is the following:

- Babies are illogical;
- Illogical persons are despised;
- Nobody is despised who can manage a crocodile.
- Therefore, babies cannot manage crocodiles.

To which we would all say, "Amen!"

That particular syllogism is not particularly useful. It's more of a brain teaser. But the ability to think logically is an important life skill.

Knowing that if $A = B$ and if $B = C$, then $A = C$ can be helpful in solving a math problem or in thinking through philosophical issues or when engaged in debate.

It turns out that thinking and living logically is crucial to the life of faith, too.

Today, our study in Acts shows the early disciples living consistently with God's truth, revealed in Jesus. They are living logically - and they call us to follow the same path, with gusto!

When we catch up with the church, fear is ruling the day. Now there are some fears that are to be avoided like the plague. But according to the Bible there is a brand of fear that is really, really healthy.

The fear of the believers in Jerusalem was prompted by the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. It was a fear that I fear many of us don't know enough about. They were experiencing the wholesome fear of the Lord.

This fear is reverence. To fear the Lord is to stand in awe of the power and holiness of God. The fear of the Lord is not an abject terror that paralyzes. It is a healthy fear that energizes.

In the aftermath of God's awesome work of judgment, the believers were impressed with His power and with the ugliness of sin in ways they hadn't been before.

And Luke paints a picture of a tremendous movement of God in the church, highlighting that power.

Background: The State of the Communion (vv. 12-16)

[Acts 5:12] At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.¹ [13] But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. [14] And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, [15] to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them.²

¹ Solomon's portico was a colonnaded area along the east side of the temple enclosure, an area to which Jesus had retreated on many occasions to teach.

² The comment about Peter's shadow does not mean that we are to think of him as having magical powers. Only that the crowds knew he was blessed by God. Like the woman who wanted to touch the hem of Jesus' garment wanted to be in close proximity to one who was obviously close to God, so the people wanted to be close to the apostles.

*[16] Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*³

Some years after the church's opening months, the apostle Paul would write to a struggling church in the city of Corinth, *[1 Corinthians 4:20]...the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.*

Here, in Acts 5 we see continuing evidence of a powerful God, manifesting that power through signs and wonders and miracles and exorcisms and healings.⁴

We are witness to a powerful sense of community, as we note that they gathered regularly *“with one accord.”* They were all about Jesus. He was the theme of their lives and of their fellowship.

We also see the effects of a powerful Gospel at work as more and more people come to faith in Jesus.

By most measures of success, the church in Jerusalem was doing great. There is highly esteemed leadership, evangelistic effectiveness, the undeniable presence of the power of God, and genuine community!

As the story continues we come to a familiar word at Acts 5:17. It is the word *“But.”* We've seen that word before and where that word pop up we usually find trouble ahead.

Wherever there is success in the things of God, Satan will set up speed traps and roadblocks. The particular road block he has set in place looks strangely familiar...

³ People were coming from all around Jerusalem to be healed. In this, history was repeating itself, for they did the same thing with Jesus (see Matthew 4:24).

⁴ And God's initiative in providing power to the apostles for these miracles provides a setting in which the other believers can tell others about Jesus. Let's never forget the pattern: God acts; we speak.

In the Jail Again (vv. 17-25)

“Prison Fellowship” for ALL the Apostles (vv. 17-18)

Naming the opposition (v. 17)

Jealous Sadducees

[17] But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.

The Sadducees have taken center stage before. They were among the group that had been so opposed to Jesus and had made sure that He was dealt with. They were also those who had earlier seen to it that Peter and John spent a night in jail (see Acts 4).

Luke identifies their problem as *jealousy*. They held great political power in Jerusalem. They had been jealous of the following Jesus had during His earthly ministry. Now they are jealous of His followers' following.

Offended Sadducees

In addition to being jealous, though, I think that they were likely *offended* at having been dissed by the apostles. When they had released Peter and John from their earlier jail sentence they had given them a command to speak no more in the Name of Jesus.

Well, here are these followers of Jesus, disobeying their commands, speaking about Jesus again. And the powerful Sadducees simply were not going to stand for that sort of thing!

When Jesus had horned in on THEIR territory, had invaded THEIR turf, they dealt with Him forcefully.

Now the apostles, by their preaching, teaching, and miracle-working, are doing the same thing. The Sadducees are prepared to deal with them just as forcefully as they had with Jesus.

A time for action! (v. 18)

[18] They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.

Before, it was just Peter and John. The way I read this, they rounded up the whole herd of the Twelve and threw them in jail together.

We know that the earlier jail sentence was a one-nighter. But it may well have been that the intent of the Sadducees was for THIS jail sentence to be a good bit longer. Several days. Weeks. Months maybe. Let these guys think about what they were doing. Let them be humiliated in a “public jail.” (That description wasn’t used in Acts 4)

The point of the jail sentence is to convince the apostles that it simply isn’t worth it to keep on talking about and living for Jesus.

Well, while I’m sure that God noted the intent of the Sadducees, He had other plans...

“Catch & Release” Apostles (vv. 19-21a)

Released (v. 19)

[19] But during the night an angel of the Lord⁵ opened the gates of the prison...

And, just like that, the apostles found themselves standing outside the jail in the middle of the night. Now think with me about the God-sized things that had to happen for this miraculous jailbreak to have occurred. I can think of at least three:

- The locked jail door had to be unlocked and then opened.
- The guards had to remain asleep during the jail break.
- The gate had to be closed and locked behind them after they got out. (That this actually happened becomes a little clearer later on.)

⁵ Some commentators, like William Barclay, deny that the one (Greek *αγγελος*) who released the apostles was an angel. It is true that “*αγγελος*” is translated in some places simply “messenger” and can refer to a human being. But, in this case, it seems clear that the point of the story is God’s involvement in the apostles’ rescue.

Once outside and in the night air, the angel who had enabled the jailbreak spoke to the apostles.

Re-commissioned (v. 20)

He told them, ***[20] “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”***

I find this fascinating. The angel of the Lord went to all the trouble to see to the release of the apostles. And the point was NOT to bring them from jail to safety. It was to thrust them back out on to the front lines of spiritual warfare.

The angel did not even encourage them to take a few days for R&R. No, he sent them straight from the frying pan of jail into the fire of witness.

That tells me that our Commander-in-Chief (God!) is absolutely committed to the mission of bringing the Gospel to those who are lost - even at the expense of His soldiers.

Now the Lord loves us. There is no question about that. We who are His are saved. We are safe forevermore. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8), not even death.

But there are others who are not safe and sound in the arms of God. They need to be rescued. And the expeditionary force to accomplish that task is US!

This is God’s plan. Use the saved - who can never be unsaved - to rescue the lost.

Jesus, who proved His love for you and me by giving His life on the cross is less concerned with our safety, our security, our reputations and our comfort than we might have ever thought.

Having rescued our eternal souls, He considers our lives expendable in the on-going turf wars on planet earth for the souls of others.

If there are inconveniences, costs, even casualties along the way, it is worth it. The people you know who do not know Jesus need Him more than you need relief.

He misses them. He loves them. He loves them so much that He is willing to send people like apostles and people like me and people like you to go get them.

It's just logical.

Well, we read that this angelic jail break took place *“during the night.”* Following their release, they may have taken a bit of time to sleep, freshen up, collect themselves.

But then, as soon as it was light, as soon as it was reasonable to go there, they headed straight to the Temple, just like the angel told them to do.

Re-engaged (v. 21a)

[21a] Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.

What do you think was going through the apostles' minds as they walked toward the Temple and then into the Temple precincts?

Would there have been memories of jail? Trepidation about another arrest? Fear?

Sure!

I think that it does no good for us to think that they didn't experience a bit of nervousness or fear at the prospect of witnessing for Jesus again. Fear would be understandable, maybe even inevitable.

But they also knew the fear/reverence of the Lord and THAT fear trumped their fear of the Sadducees. So, they spoke right up!

While the apostles were sharing the Gospel at the Temple, Luke turns our attention to another location in Jerusalem.

The Sadducees were probably thinking that they had finally shut those apostles up. You can almost read their minds - *“Let's just give them a bit of time in jail, show them what they are up against. All this fuss about Jesus will soon be over and done with.”*

Never in their wildest dreams did they imagine an angel-inspired plot to break the apostles out of jail. The scene at the Council on that morning is really pretty funny.

Not knowing what had happened the night before, the High Priest called for the apostles to be brought out of prison and to stand trial before the Sanhedrin.

Found and Lost and Found! (vv. 21b-26)

Mission NOT accomplished! (vv. 21b-24)

[21b] Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. [22] But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, [23] saying, “We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.” [24] Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.⁶

So, officers were sent from the Sanhedrin to the jail. But at the jail, the officers of the Council learned that the apostles were GONE. And the messengers returned to the Council empty-handed.

Now, everybody knows that the apostles aren't there, but nobody has a clue as to where they might be or how the jail had been emptied.

⁶ F.F. Bruce remarks that the captain of the Temple would have been very perturbed, as he and his crew were responsible for the prisoners' safekeeping. According to verse 24, the soldiers were pretty concerned about the ramifications for their personal careers after this jail break. In the first century, at least for the Romans, heads rolled when a prisoner escaped. So, you better believe that the soldiers were concerned!

From jail to the Temple (v. 25)

While they were all standing or sitting with question marks on their faces, confused, befuddled, an unnamed and unidentified man rushed in on the scene and announced, [25]... ***“The men whom you put in prison⁷ are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”***

So, having already sent the officers from the Council chambers to the jail, they now send them to the temple with instructions to bring them back to the Sanhedrin to stand trial.

From Temple to Court! (v. 26)

[26] Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).⁸

And now it all comes to a head. This is a true face-off. The apostles are standing before the Sanhedrin in a classic confrontation.

Apostles vs. Council, Round 2 (vv. 27-40)

The Apostles - Scolded by the Council (vv. 27-28)

[27] When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, [28] saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

Right out of the chute the High Priest reminded the apostles that they had been instructed to speak no more about Jesus.

⁷ Note the emphasis of the unnamed announcer, ***“YOU put in prison.”*** (i.e. *“your plans have been thwarted”*)

⁸ I wonder if Luke only explains part of the reason for the lack of violence in the re-arrest of the apostles. The first part is that, yes, the guards were afraid of a riot breaking out among the people, because the apostles were popular in Jerusalem at this time (and they, the Temple Guard, were definitely NOT!). But the second reason for the peacefulness is that the apostles themselves didn’t resist - and their lack of resistance is a beautiful picture of their trust in God.

“We meant it the first time. Did you think we were kidding? Just talking to hear ourselves make noise? Not serious?”

And he goes to on to make the claim that the apostles are intending to ***“bring this man’s blood upon us.”***

Now the Council probably meant by these words that the apostles were trying to pin guilt on them for the death of Jesus. True statement. The Sanhedrin was guilty, from a human perspective, for Jesus’ death.

HOWEVER, the apostles would have said there was more to it than that. They wanted to see the blood of Jesus cover the Sanhedrin for forgiveness’ sake.

They wanted to see their enemies, the men who had arrested them - the very men who had been responsible for the death of Jesus! - protected from the wrath of God by the blood of the Son of God.

So, yes, they were trying to bring this man’s blood on them. That is what the Gospel of Jesus is all about!

And that would be my hope and prayer for everyone here this morning, too.

- I hope that before you leave today the blood of this Man, Jesus, would cover you.
- I hope that you place your trust in Him and in Him alone.
- I hope that you receive the free gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins that can be yours on the basis of His shed blood.
- I hope and pray that you come to Jesus this day!

Now, back to the story...

What will the apostles say in response to the Sanhedrin’s accusations and threats? It’s not surprising that Simon Peter served as the spokesman for the group. He stood up, stood his ground and spoke boldly.

The Apostles - Standing Firm! (vv. 29-32)

Point 1: "We must obey God rather than man"

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

Now that is the most logical comment you'll ever hear. If there is a God, it is eminently reasonable that we should obey Him rather than any other human being.

Peter and the rest of the apostles understood that, ultimately, life is all about what God says to do, not about what any man says to do.

And Peter isn't finished. Just to be sure that the members of the Sanhedrin weren't in the dark about Jesus, he evangelizes them!

Point 2: "Hey, have you guys heard the Gospel?"

[30] "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. [31] He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel,⁹ and forgiveness of sins. [32] And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit,¹⁰ whom God has given to those who obey Him."^{11,12}

⁹ The way Peter speaks, it would appear that repentance is a good gift of God. In fact, that is the case.

¹⁰ See John 15:26-27, for the Holy Spirit's witness to Jesus through the disciples.

¹¹ Peter says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who "obey" Jesus. Does that mean that the Spirit's presence in a person's life is dependent on their moral obedience? No! Several passages in the New Testament speak about obedience to Jesus in terms of trusting Him for salvation. In Romans 1:5, it is clearly this idea that Paul is communicating when he writes, **"through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name's sake"**. Consider also, John 6:29, **"Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'"** (See John 3:36; Romans 15:18; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 5:8-9; 1 Peter 4:7. The New Testament is clear that when a person places trust in Jesus for salvation, obeying the command of God, they receive the Holy Spirit.

¹² There is no higher measure of love than to hope for and work for God's best for your enemies, those who have done you the dirtiest. And the apostles showed something of the spirit of Jesus, who prayed, **"Father, forgive them for they do not**

Amazing. Peter, standing trial for the supposed crime of preaching Jesus, preaches Jesus to the prosecution! How bold is that?!

And how logical is it that he should care for the eternal souls of these men? Jesus died for them. Clearly, Jesus loved them. It is only reasonable that he should also lovingly present the Good News to them that they, too, can receive eternal life by placing their trust in Him.

Sadly, we aren't surprised that Peter's words provoked the full fury of the Council.

The Apostles - an Unexpected Sponsor (vv. 33-39)

Conviction and wrath (v. 33)

[33] But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.

If they were **"cut to the quick"** with conviction of the truth of what Peter said, a really good response would have been repentance. Faith. Turning to God. Trust. But that wasn't coming.

They were on the verge of killing them,¹³ when deliverance arose from an unexpected source.

Just at the moment when it seemed that Peter might have stepped over a line, when it seemed that his boldness might have cost them all their lives, God brought an advocate to their rescue from within the ranks of the Council itself, who pleaded for a policy of moderation - on the basis of logic.

Listen as a wise man, a Pharisee¹⁴ named Gamaliel, first clears the room of the apostles, and then counsels the Council.

know what they are doing" from the cross when they continued to engage and be bold before the Sanhedrin.

¹³ Presumably by stoning, which is what they will do shortly to Stephen, Acts 7.

¹⁴ Later on, the tension between Pharisees and Sadducees was to be a means of deliverance for Paul, Acts 23:6-10.

Moderation and wisdom (vv. 34-39)

Gamaliel was a regular member of the Sanhedrin, although he was not a Sadducee. He was a Pharisee, a teacher of the Law who was well respected by all the people.¹⁵

And, while we need to remember that the Pharisees received some of Jesus' harshest rebukes, from a human perspective, the apostles owe their lives to this Gamaliel. He shows great wisdom, maturity, and restraint in his words here.

[34] But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. [35] And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. [36] "For some time ago Theudas¹⁶ rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. [37] "After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. [38] "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; [39] but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

Gamaliel's wisdom prevailed and the Council (grudgingly?) agreed to hold off killing the apostles. They relented and decided to release the Twelve.

The Apostles, Lashed Then Unleashed (v. 40)

[40] They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.

¹⁵ Jewish tradition tells us that he was a disciple (or perhaps the grandson) of the rather liberal-minded Rabbi, Hillel.

¹⁶ The Jewish historian Josephus mentions a man named Theudas, an impostor who persuaded many to take their possessions and follow him to the Jordan, evidently posing as a second Moses who would part the waters and lead the people to a place where they would be free from Roman domination. This may or may not have been the same Theudas mentioned by Luke in Acts 5.

Did you get that?

"Yeah, you're right Gamaliel. We should not oppose these guys on the outside chance that they might be speaking the truth. So...LET'S FLOG THEM BEFORE WE LET THEM GO!"

"Flogging" was not the same punishment Jesus endured before He was crucified. That beating was called a "scourging" and was administered by the Romans. The details of the scourging are almost too ghastly to mention in a public setting.

But a flogging was no light, trivial affair. It is the "forty lashes minus one"¹⁷ With a three stranded strap of calf hide, a soldier would beat a man about his back and chest.

Thirty nine lashes was given to each of the apostles. Extremely painful. Serious loss of blood. And the hope is that this flogging coupled with another tongue-lashing will convince the apostles that, again, it is just not worth it to keep on talking about Jesus.

Well, the story is almost over. Only one final comment to see. And that one final comment tells us of something utterly amazing.

In looking at what we have seen this morning some people point to verses 12-16 as describing the most spectacular event in this passage. And it is wonderful to read about a powerful God, a powerful community and a powerful Gospel.

Others focus on how God opened prison doors and set the captives free, right under the noses of the Temple guards. And I'll grant that all of that is exciting, too.

But, for my money you can't get a greater example of the miracle-working power of God than what we find AFTER the flogging.

¹⁷ The Law required that a fellow Jew not be beaten with more than 40 lashes, lest he be humiliated. The Jews of Jesus' day stopped at thirty nine in case their might have been a miscounting.

Taking it BACK to the Streets (vv. 41-42)

Shamed, but Not ASHAMED! (v. 41)

[41] So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

I've got to believe that as they left the words of Jesus were ringing in their ears.

[Matthew 5:10] Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (see also Luke 6:22-23)

- They must have seen the parallels between their treatment and Jesus' experience.
- They must have remembered the Lord's warnings about persecutions to come.
- They must have heard His promises about the blessings that come to those who suffer for Him.

True, they had been shamefully treated. Sure, they had been subjected to physical suffering, humiliation, threats, and contempt. But, they were NOT of a mind that God had abandoned them.

Their understanding of what life was all about, sourced in the words of Jesus, protected their hearts from discouragement. They were honored to be dishonored for Jesus.

And flowing out of their God-honoring attitudes came bold, God-honoring actions.

Beaten, but not BROKEN! (v. 42)

[42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

They gave no more heed to the Sanhedrin's second set of instructions than they had to the first. They didn't retreat. They didn't back down. They kept on keeping on.

Their actions showed that they hadn't just been blowing smoke in verse 29, "*We must obey God rather than men.*"

They really were less concerned about obeying the Sanhedrin, and more concerned to obey God!¹⁸

Conclusion:

And how very logical.

The apostles looked at all they had been through in light of all they knew about Jesus and logically concluded that it was all worth it.

And today, given what Jesus has given us and what is in store for us after this life is over, isn't it only logical to conclude that:

- He is the only One worthy of the first place in our hearts.
- He is the only One worthy of our allegiance and commitment.
- He is the only One worth risking it all for.

The apostles didn't let jail time or beatings derail them from their mission. Millions of our brothers and sisters around the world are on the same page today.

Are you ready to join them in a wholehearted, passionate commitment to the mission of the Lord Jesus?

Such a life is, after all, only logical.

¹⁸ In the first wave of persecution, the church prayed for boldness to go on preaching. In the second wave, they were led to praise God for the honor of suffering for Christ.