

## **“Jailbreak”**

*Acts 5:12-42*

Dr. Jarrett Stephens | October 3, 2021

We are continuing in our *FORWARD* series today and the title of the message is: **Jailbreak**

I've mentioned to you before, my childhood dream. I wanted to play college football and coach high school football. And I would have played in college football had any coach asked me to! They didn't AND God my senior year really turned my heart toward ministry and football became a distant second place in my life.

My dad had played football in college and he was my hero...I wanted to be like him. Football was kind of the love language around our house. My older brother played, I played...and let me just say this: With every passing year I get better and better (in my own mind!).

Now, I played mostly defense when I was coming up but loved offense the most. In fact, that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be an offense coordinator. The thought of drawing up plays...attacking defenses...keep the opposing team on their toes – it's what I wanted to do...would daydream about it!

One of the reasons I love the church so much and being a pastor is I feel kind of like a head football coach. Well, Jesus is the head coach and so maybe that makes me the offensive coordinator for the team called Champion Forest. I like that because just like in a football game, I see the church as being on offense.

Jesus said in **Matt. 16:18b** – “**...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**”

The church is in an offensive position. The Church is on the move...it advances...we WILL (as we have named this series) continue to move *FORWARD* and nothing will prevail against us, not even hell itself.

Now, that picture...that description fires me up. And it's exactly what we see taking places in these early chapters of Acts.

The early church is running the plays Jesus, the head coach calls and they are moving the gospel ball *FORWARD* aggressively!

And I'm telling you in these early chapters of Acts, the early church is running up the score on the Devil! I mean just think of what we have seen thus far since we started this series:

**Acts 2:41** (at Pentecost) – “**So those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**”

**Acts 2:47** (as the early church continued to meet) – “...**And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**”

**Acts 4:4** (right after the healing of the lame man, Peter preaches to those who gathered around) – “**But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of men** (doesn’t seem to include women and children) **came to about five thousand.**”

The Church is advancing...it’s on the offense! Thousands of people are embracing this message of hope in Christ, repenting of sin and turning their lives over to Jesus...so much so that by **Acts 5:14** (they basically stop keeping count!) “**And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.**”

Running up the score...CHANGED LIVES is the scoreboard! I’m not saying it’s the ONLY thing that matters...to keep our football analogy going:

- first downs matter...
- third down conversions matter...
- execution of the game-plan matters...

In church life:

- fellowship matters...
- meeting needs in our faith community and beyond matters...
- gathering in small groups matters...

But at the end of the day, it’s the scoreboard that reflects whether or not we are on the offensive and the scoreboard that counts is CHANGED LIVES!

A church that is moving forward...a church that is advancing...a church that is taking ground is a church that is seeing lost people saved and added to the faith family. Let’s never lose sight of this!

It’s why we are ALWAYS going to celebrate believer’s baptism. This is why we are ALWAYS going to celebrate when someone comes forward at the invitation and they are joining our church or trusting in Christ! That’s a touchdown and who doesn’t like scoring touchdowns!

### **Illus. A&M game**

I say ALL this at the outset of the message today because I really want to highlight and emphasize that the early church was a growing church. People by the hundreds and thousands were coming to know Jesus and join this new movement that would eventually be referred to as “The Way”.

We don’t need to ever feel like we need to apologize or defend ourselves for being a big church...a growing church. We don’t need to ever apologize as a church for celebrating and pointing to the scoreboard when someone receives Christ – this is our mission!

This is why we do what we do! Any church that is on the offensive is going to see numerical growth precisely because they are pushing back darkness and welcoming those far from Christ into their fellowship.

So, Champion Forest...as long as there is one person out there that doesn't know Jesus, we still have room to grow! So, let's stay on mission...and stay on the offensive and keep reaching people for Jesus. A church that is moving forward will be a church that continues to grow.

**Illus. Multi-site strategy** – I'm getting ready in the coming weeks in one of these messages in Acts to speak to and about our multi-site ministry and strategy. This is ONE of the ways we continue to grow and advance and move forward.

We plant churches AND campuses...it's not either/or, it's both/and! And I really look forward to unpacking with you why I believe it's important that we continue to do both in the future. It's just ONE of the ways we stay on the offensive.

The early church was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved! We've gone from 120 believers in Acts 1 to a multitude that can't be counted here in Acts 5.

God is on the move and therefore his church is too. And listen, the church is not that just growing numerically. But as we have seen in previous weeks:

- they are growing in their faith...
- they are growing in their unity...
- they are growing in their giving...
- they are growing in grace toward together...

Yes, the size of the church is growing, but so too is the size of their heart! And whenever you see a church that is advancing and moving forward like this...has a heart like this, you better believe opposition is coming.

That's what we see in this text we are looking at today. It's a truth that we see over and over again!

We talked about this a few weeks ago in our message on Acts chapter four. I encourage you if you missed it to go back and listen or at least go back online and download the notes. The entire sermon was about the reality of persecution and what our response to persecution and opposition should be.

I want to give you an equation that will set up where we are going for the rest of our time together. Here it is:

**Opposition = Opportunity**

Let's look at our text. The church is on the move. It's growing like crazy and here comes the opposition.

**Acts 5:17-18 – “But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy (Interesting...you are going to be filled with something, Christian...you are supposed to be filled with Jesus! Ananias last week was filled with lies from Satan, here these ruling officials are filled with jealous – the word is a picture of something “boiling over” – they were hot!) <sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.”**

Here opposition to the gospel comes in the form of public prison. This idea of “public prison” – means it was open or visible to the public. It was to serve as an example.

The High Priest and the Sanhedrin wanted to teach a lesson...they wanted to send a message to this group of followers, “If you don't stop doing what we asked you to (teach in his name) than this is what awaits you.”

They were thinking this would put the fire out! They were jealous of these crowds that were forming around the apostles...jealous of the amount of followers they were gaining. I mean these apostles were getting some “blue checks” by their name (social media term) and the religious leaders didn't like it one bit!

And so they arrest them...and did you notice? This time, it wasn't just Peter and John who were arrested, (v. 18) says they arrested all the apostles.

Now, if we are to see opposition as opportunity, we need to have the proper mind-set to see it as such when it makes its way into our lives. We will only see opposition as opportunity if we are viewing it through the right lens.

**Illus. Press-box** – We've talked a lot of football today, so let's stick with that analogy. Every coaching staff has coaches that are down on the field and they are also in the press-box.

You put coaches in the press-box so they can have a view of the whole field. They have a different perspective than the coaches on the field have. They can see things that you may not can see from the sidelines.

So figuratively, let's me and you get up to the press-box and see what's taking place WHEN (not if) opposition comes our way because it will come our way. We read some of these verses a few weeks ago, but it's good to remind ourselves of them.

**John 15:20a – “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you...”**

**1 Thess. 3:3 – “...no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.”**

**2 Tim. 3:12 – “Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”**

Press-box view of opposition...and again, we have to understand this if we are to see opposition to the gospel as an opportunity for the gospel.

Here it is: Sometimes God allows persecution and opposition to come to believers. And sometimes God appoints persecution and opposition to come to believers. Either way, persecution and opposition should serve to strengthen our trust in and dependence on God, and grow our faith in him.

I want to read it again and I'll just put in bold so you can follow along on the screen:

**Sometimes God *allows* persecution and opposition to come to believers. And sometimes God *appoints* persecution and opposition to come to believers. Either way, persecution and opposition should serve to strengthen our trust in and dependence on God, and grow our faith in him.**

I think the temptation is to think that all opposition and persecution we face is from the enemy...and much of it is. Satan opposes the gospel and will do anything to keep the work of Christ from moving forward.

And one of the greatest tools he has in his arsenal is hatred toward Christians that is expressed through persecution and opposition.

**Illus. Missions Weekend** – This is Andrew Brunson's story that he will share with us on Oct. 24 at our missions weekend. **(SHOW IMAGE)**

Satan wants to stamp out the gospel so he sends opposition our way...and God in his sovereignty ALLOWS it to happen! This is the case with some opposition and persecution. If we peeled back the curtain we would see the angel of darkness at play. No doubt about it!

But consider for a moment this press-box perspective on opposition. Could it be God in his sovereignty has APPOINTED this persecution or opposition to come into your life? This is a different way to think about it...to look at it.

**Life Application Bible – “Have you ever thought of persecution as a blessing, as something worth rejoicing about? This beating suffered by Peter and John was the first time any of the apostles had been physically abused for their faith. These men knew how Jesus had suffered, and they praised God that he had allowed them to be persecuted like their Lord. If you are mocked or persecuted for your faith, it isn't because you're doing something wrong but because God has counted you "worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." So don't resent opposition, but regard it as a sign that you have been faithful to Christ.”**

Remember what God is MOST after in our lives? It's to conform us to his son, Jesus. And what conforms us to Christ more than anything else in life? Is it not trials...difficult times...going through the fire?

Any missionary overseas will tell you the gospel advances WAY more in times of adversity than it does in times of prosperity.

If we are to see opposition to the gospel as an opportunity for the gospel, we must understand that whether God allows the persecution and opposition and suffering or whether he appoints it – either way it should serve to strengthen our trust in and dependence on God, and grow our faith in him.

Seeing it this way...from this perspective...it changes the way we absorb what is happening to us. Again, looking at it like this, we can see opposition not just as an opportunity but as a reward. Christ is trusting us with this opposition.

And speaking of trust, I see in this text three opportunities for the gospel to go forward in the midst of persecution and opposition.

### **1. An opportunity to trust Jesus**

Any opposition that comes our way (whether appointed or allowed) is an opportunity for us to trust Jesus in the midst of it.

I remind you, these apostles are doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing and they are in jail because of it. We read this, and just glance over it, but think about that. They are obeying the commands of Jesus and get a night in public jail.

And I just want to go on record I've never been in jail (and going to try and keep that streak alive as your pastor – I think that's probably a good thing. High goals here!) I've never been to jail, but assume it can be pretty rough...heard it can sober a person up! That's what these officials want a night in jail to do to these apostles.

This is tough! They are experiencing opposition, but this opposition is actually an opportunity for them to grow in their trust in Jesus and put the gospel on display at an even deeper level.

- They didn't know how long they were going to be in jail...
- They didn't know an angel was about to perform a jailbreak and miraculously deliver them...

Remember, this group that has just put them in prison is the same group that had Jesus arrested, out in prison and killed. They weren't below doing it again. How is this group of apostles going to respond to this opposition?

We don't get a hint of any complaining...we don't from the text get a sense of any bitterness toward God because he has allowed this to happen. Again, their mindset could have been "we've been destined for this."

I think these apostles see the opposition they are facing as an opportunity for them to trust Jesus and in this, the gospel to go forward. I think their mindset is, we are going to pass this test!

Again, think about the idea of opposition as privilege. **Warren Wiersbe – "It is an honor and a privilege to suffer with Christ and be treated by the world the way it treated Him. "The fellowship of His sufferings" is a gift from God. Not every believer grows to the point where God can trust him with this kind of experience, so we ought to rejoice when the privilege comes to us."**

Love this! God trusts them with opposition and they receive it as an opportunity to grow in their trust in him!

It really is two sides of the same coin. Satan wants to try you and cause you to fail and fall. Jesus wants to test you, help you to stand and strengthen your faith as a result.

**1 Peter 1:6-7 – "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."**

**James 1:2-4 – "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."**

Remember God is growing his church numerically in all this, but God can do two things at once! He is also growing individuals faith...and the single greatest way to grow our faith is to stretch us...put us in the fire...appoint or allow some opposition and persecution – either way both are filtering through his hand a part of a plan he is working in your life.

It's an opportunity for us to identify with Jesus, trust Jesus and in trusting Jesus the gospel goes forward. Remember this the next time opposition comes...it's an opportunity.

I see a second opportunity that presents itself in the midst of persecution and opposition.

## **2. An opportunity to obey Jesus**

**Acts 5:19-20 – "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out (I love this...the Sadducees were the ones who arrested the apostles. Theologically, they didn't believe in the resurrection or the supernatural! So God just keeps making supernatural stuff happen and sends an angel to release them from prison! It's jailbreak!) and said, <sup>20</sup>"Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."**

I love this whole idea of the “words of this LIFE”. Life is who Jesus is. And let me tell you something, this is what a lost and spiritually dying world needs most – they need LIFE!

And Jesus is life! Jesus and his disciples referred to him as “life” on a number of occasions, specifically in the gospel of John. It’s a major theme of this gospel and is mentioned some 35x. Let me just read you a few...Listen to these passages of scripture:

**John 1:4 – “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”**

**John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

**John 6:35 – “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”**

**John 8:12 – “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

**John 10:10 – “The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”**

**John 11:25 – “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”**

**John 14:6 – “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

**John 20:30-31 – “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

**1 John 5:12 – “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”**

I have you one equation already. Opposition equals opportunity. Well, let me give you another equation: **JESUS = LIFE**

And here these apostles have been arrested for teaching in the name of Jesus. They are supernaturally released...and instead of going back and hiding out, they are commanded to go right back where they were and to keep doing what they were doing – speaking to the people all the words of this life – telling people about Jesus.

Opposition to the gospel gave an opportunity for the gospel...all these disciples had to do was obey and the gospel was going FORWARD. And look, I want us to notice something about their obedience. It was both immediate and it was exact.

**Acts 5:21 - “When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach.”**

Hey, question for you? What would happen if we just applied that to our lives today? If we did exactly what God told us to do immediately when he told us to do it? How that would change our lives?!

**Illus. my kids** – this would be a game-changer! God probably thinks the same thing about us! We’re his children.

Notice, they did not ask for understanding. Again, on the surface, this command doesn’t make sense to me! Here is how I would be thinking: “Why, God would you break me out of jail and command me to go back and do the very thing that got me in here? I don’t understand...why don’t you just keep me in here?”

God does NOT ask of us to understand what he commands of us...he asks us to obey what he commands us!

It’s MORE obedience, NOT MORE understanding that Christians need. We want to understand why God does, what he does, but what God wants is for us to obey and trust him and leave the results and consequences to him.

**Illus. Charles Stanley – Obey God and let him worry about the consequences.”**

Opposition is an opportunity! It’s an opportunity as we as the old hymn says to “trust and obey”. Obedience to Jesus is so important.

What did Jesus say about it? **John 14:15 – “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”**

There is no qualifier on this statement! To love Jesus is to obey him:

- NOT just when it’s easy!
- NOT just when it’s convenient.
- NOT just when we want to!

Again, it’s immediate and exact. We obey him even when it is difficult...even when it costs us! Sometimes what God commands will bring a crisis! It does here...they get a beating for it!

You keep reading this story and the ruling council doesn’t know what to do! When they went to bed the night before, these men were in prison. When they woke up, they jail is still (v. 23) “securely locked”, but the men are not in it!

Instead, they are standing in the temple teaching! How did they get there? How did this happen? (v. 24) says these leaders are “greatly perplexed”...they are at their wit’s end...they are about to go crazy.

So, they decide to bring them back in...the high priest questions them. Look at **Acts 5:27-29** – **“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching (Our goal as a church...what a reputation! FILLED Spring and Klein and Jersey Village and Conroe – wherever we go as a church this is the goal!), and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”**

There it is! Opposition has become an opportunity. We see a third opportunity for the gospel to go forward in opposition here.

1. An opportunity to trust Jesus
2. An opportunity to obey Jesus
3. **An opportunity to share Jesus**

Peter and the apostles are so faithful. Whenever a door opens, they take it as an opportunity to share Jesus. This is what we see taking place here:

**Acts 5:29-32** – **“But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. (There is a higher court than the Sanhedrin!) The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”**

Peter and the apostles share Jesus! Opposition became an opportunity to share the gospel. Here the disciples are being faithful to share Jesus.

Now, this doesn't mean people want to hear it! Look at **Acts 5:33** – **“When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.”**

And they probably would have killed them if it were not for a Pharisee named Gamaliel that had some influence and through some reasoning of his own softened this bunch up a bit. And so, instead of killing them, they beat them.

**Acts 5:40-42** – **“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. <sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (it was a privilege...they felt honored to suffer dishonor!)<sup>42</sup> And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.”**

Opposition equals opportunity. It was in this text for these disciples, and it will be for us in the future as well.

This is the application today. What we see in these disciples...what we learn from them...in how they viewed opposition and responded to opposition...it's a powerful example for us.

**Illus. Endorsements & Examples to follow** - An example is a powerful thing. In the last two weeks, I've written two endorsements for friends of mine who have books coming out.

One, is by a friend named Connor Bales (tell story) *Counted Worthy*. The second is by a guy named Daniel Ritchie (tell story) *Endure*. In both books as I have read them...I've said the same thing. It's one thing to write a message...it's another thing entirely to live the message. I'll read these books because they are written by people who are living it out. Knowing how to endure is a good thing, but having an example of what it means is better.

Example is powerful. So, let's follow the example of this early church. And when opposition comes, let's see it as an opportunity. An opportunity to:

1. Trust Jesus
2. Obey Jesus
3. Share Jesus

Will you pray with me?

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*