

THE ART OF BATTLING GIANTS

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Acts 5.12-42

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I. Introduction to this Study

This is the final week of our series The Art of Battling Giants, based on the David and Goliath story. We've looked at the obvious giants we battle daily, discussed the idea of "desirable difficulties" that God can use to bring transformation to us, and thought together about the giants that sometimes exist between us, the hurts that need forgiveness.

This week we will think about the giant of injustice. When something isn't right, what are we called to do? Who are we called to be?

II. Connecting with One Another

When is the last time you witnessed/read about/watched something that made you righteously angry? What was it? How did you respond?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Acts 5:12-18. Describe what Luke (the author of Acts) summarizes in these verses. What is God doing in and through the apostles?
- b. Why do you think "the high priest and all his associates" were jealous of the apostles?
- c. This is not the apostles' first brush with the authorities (see Acts 4:18-20). Why do you think they were jailed this second time?
- d. Read Acts 5:19-28. An "angel of the Lord" frees the apostles during the night and gives them instructions. They obey and are eventually arrested again. What do the words of the high priest in verse 28 tell us about the motivations and fears of the Jewish authorities?
- e. Read 5:29-33. Peter answers their charges and uses the opportunity to give a mini-presentation of the gospel. What truths about Jesus does he communicate?
- f. Why do you think the authorities reacted with such anger to the apostles' words? "We must obey God rather than men!" (v. 29) What is this implying about the Jewish leaders?
- g. Read Acts 5:34-39. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council, the body that settled religious issues for the community. They were under Roman authority but were largely free to administer justice as they saw fit, excluding capital punishment. Gamaliel was a very well-respected Pharisee, admired for his wisdom and revered for his interpretation of the law.

How does Gamaliel diffuse the situation? What does he propose? Gamaliel obviously has a high view of God's sovereignty. (Sovereignty: God's ultimate rule and Lordship over the universe so that the divine will is supreme over all else.) How can such a high

view of God's sovereignty be a comfort in life? Can it be used as an excuse, as well? How?

- h. Read Acts 5:40-42. The apostles do not escape without punishment. Yet how do they receive this punishment? Why? Does their behavior change? What does this tell us about them?
- i. The apostles obviously disobeyed the authority of the Sanhedrin. Read I Peter 2:13-14 and Romans 13:1-2. These passages tell us to *obey* those in authority over us. Now, if you have time, Read Daniel 3 and Daniel 6. These stories share more examples of God's people *disobeying* authority. What principle should Christians have in mind when evaluating authorities over them?

This quote from John Stott regarding Romans 13 may help:

"...the God-ordained purpose of the power [government authorities] have been given is to promote good and punish evil. What shall we do, then, when they use it rather to punish good and promote evil? We must resist. 'Civil disobedience' is a biblical concept...since the state's authority has been delegated to it by God, we are to submit to it right up to the point where obedience to the state would involve disobedience to God. At that point it is our Christian duty to disobey the state in order to obey God."

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. There are many examples of righteous disobedience in the history of God's church: early Christians refusing to worship the emperor, the Protestant Reformation, and the church's activity in the civil rights movement are just a few. What examples can you think of?
- b. In your opinion, what injustices should Christians be concerned about today? Why?
- c. When you think about the authorities in your life (i.e. parents, teachers, employers, government officials, religious leaders...), which ones are easy to submit to and which are difficult? Why?
- d. Is it at all challenging to place obedience to God and God's ways, as revealed in scripture and through Jesus, above the other authorities in your life? Why or why not?
- e. What place should Christian community (church, small groups) have in determining whether or not to battle a perceived injustice?

V. Pray

- a. Ask God to give you eyes to see injustice in our world, the courage to respond, and the wisdom to always place God as your ultimate authority, even if it's not popular.
- b. Pray for those around the world suffering from injustices. (If you're interested in learning more about injustice and Christian response, visit International Justice Mission at www.ijm.org)
- c. Please continue to pray for gracious hearts—and God's will—as our presbytery meets in coming weeks to vote on our dismissal from PC(USA). (You might consider Gamaliel's speech in our passage when thinking and praying about this!)

VI. A Quote Worth Quoting

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Martin Luther King, Jr.