

International Conversation Cafe

Community Group: The Beginning of the Church

Setting the Stage: After Jesus was raised from the dead he was on earth for 40 days talking about the kingdom of God, doing miracles, and proving that he was really alive again. After the 40 days, he told his disciples to meet him, and he gave them some final instructions before he ascended into heaven.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So you must go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And you can be sure that I am always with you, to the very end. Matthew 28:18

What is Jesus' command?

What is a disciple?

What do Jesus' last words tell us about Jesus?

Continue reading to see how the disciples obeyed Jesus' words.

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. Mark 16:20

Some people opposed the message of the disciples, responding violently and putting the disciples in jail. This story from the book of Acts helps us to see the driving motivation for these men and women who decided to follow Jesus.

Read the story from Acts 5:17-42

Acts 5:17-42 The Apostles Persecuted

¹⁷ The high priest and all his companions were Sadducees. They were very jealous of the apostles.¹⁸ So they arrested them and put them in the public prison.¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord came. He opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out.²⁰ "Go! Stand in the temple courtyard," the angel said. "Tell the people all about this new life."

²¹ Early the next day they did as they had been told. They entered the temple courtyard. There they began to teach the people.

The high priest and his companions arrived. They called the Sanhedrin together. The Sanhedrin was a gathering of all the elders of Israel. They sent for the apostles who were in prison.²² The officers arrived at the prison. But they didn't find the apostles there. So they went back and reported it.²³ "We found the prison locked up tight," they said. "The guards were standing at the doors. But when we opened the doors, we didn't find anyone inside."²⁴ When the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard this report, they were bewildered. They wondered what would happen next.

²⁵ Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courtyard. They are teaching the people."²⁶ So the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles back. But they didn't use force. They were afraid the people would kill them by throwing stones at them.

²⁷ They brought the apostles to be judged by the Sanhedrin. The high priest questioned them.²⁸ "We gave you clear orders not to teach in Jesus' name," he said. "But you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. You want to make us guilty of this man's death."

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied, “We must obey God instead of people! ³⁰ You had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. But the God of our people raised Jesus from the dead. ³¹ Now Jesus is Prince and Savior. God has proved this by giving him a place of honor at his own right hand. He did it so that he could turn Israel away from their sins and forgive them. ³² We are witnesses of these things. And so is the Holy Spirit. God has given the Spirit to those who obey him.”

³³ When the leaders heard this, they became very angry. They wanted to put the apostles to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up in the Sanhedrin. He was a teacher of the law. He was honored by all the people. He ordered the men to be taken outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he spoke to the Sanhedrin. “Men of Israel,” he said, “think carefully about what you plan to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared. He claimed he was really somebody. About 400 people followed him. But he was killed. All his followers were scattered. So they accomplished nothing. ³⁷ After this, Judas from Galilee came along. This was in the days when the Romans made a list of all the people. Judas led a gang of men against the Romans. He too was killed. All his followers were scattered. ³⁸ So let me give you some advice. Leave these men alone! Let them go! If their plans and actions are only human, they will fail. ³⁹ But if their plans come from God, you won’t be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁴⁰ His speech won the leaders over. They called the apostles in and had them whipped. The leaders ordered them not to speak in Jesus’ name. Then they let the apostles go.

⁴¹ The apostles were full of joy as they left the Sanhedrin. They considered it an honor to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. ⁴² Day after day, they kept teaching in the temple courtyards and from house to house. They never stopped telling the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

1. *Tell the story in your own words.*
2. *Why would the religious leaders be jealous?*
3. *Peter and the apostles said that they must obey God instead of people... why?*
4. *Why do you think Christians talk about their faith in Jesus?*

The following verse summarizes much of the story of the spread of the gospel.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Acts 8:4

The early believers obeyed Jesus by telling others about him even when they were persecuted and forced to scatter and go different places. Gradually, people in other places became followers of Jesus and met for prayer and worship. Perhaps the most well known **missionary** is Paul, who traveled from Syria to Turkey, Greece, and Rome. The letters he wrote to believers make up most of the content of the New Testament.