

## 16. The Church Faced New Persecution

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how God verified the message of the death and resurrection among both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jewish religious leaders were not happy when they saw that many people were placing their faith in Christ. As a result, the religious leaders chose to try and stop the apostles and their ministry again. We will see that instead of stopping the apostles the Lord gave the apostles boldness as they spoke about Christ.

In Acts 5:17-21, we read, “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’ And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.” We saw in the previous topic that the Lord was doing many miracles through the hands of the apostles to verify the message of the resurrection of Christ. This made the high priest and all of those who were Sadducees very angry.

The Sadducees did not believe in miracles. They especially did not believe in the resurrection. Now, they were seeing the apostles healing all that were sick with various diseases. They saw that Christ was using the apostles to cast demons out of the lives of those who had been demon possessed. Peter and John had already told the high priest and the Sanhedrin that they were doing these miracles through the power of Christ whom the religious leaders had crucified and God had raised from the dead. The high priest and the Sadducees could not deny what was happening and so they became very angry.

Then, the Sadducees seized the apostles, had them arrested and taken to the public jail. However, the Lord had a surprise for the high priest and the Sadducees. During the night, the Lord sent an angel to open the doors of the jail. The angel also gave the apostles instructions about what the Lord wanted them to do. The angel said, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” Christ said in John 10:10, “‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.’” Christ came to give people spiritual life. This was the message that the angel told the apostles to speak as they returned to the temple. Here, we see a key lesson for our own lives. When we talk to people that are not Christians, Christ has called us to share the message of His death and resurrection because that is the message that will give people spiritual life.

The apostles were obedient; and early in the morning, they returned to the temple and began to teach the people again about the resurrection of Christ. Meanwhile, the high priest called the Sanhedrin together to discuss what to do with the apostles. The Sanhedrin included the priests and the elders who were the religious leaders of the Jews. Part of the men that made up the Sanhedrin were Sadducees and part of them were Pharisees. John 12:19 says, “The Pharisees therefore said

among themselves, ‘You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!’” Before His death, it was the Pharisees and scribes who led the opposition to Christ. This changed after the resurrection. Acts 4:1-2 says, “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” After His resurrection, it was the Sadducees who led the opposition because they hated the message of the resurrection. Once the men of the Sanhedrin were gathered, they sent the guards to the prison to bring the apostles before the Sanhedrin.

When the officers went to the prison to get the apostles, they received a surprise. Acts 5:22-25 says, “But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, ‘Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!’ Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!’” The officers came to the prison and the guards were standing in front of the door into the prison. However, when they opened the door of the prison and went inside, the apostles were not inside the prison.

The officers immediately returned to the Sanhedrin and told them what had happened. They said that the prison door was securely locked. They said that the guards were outside the door carefully guarding it so that no one could enter or leave the prison. Then, the officers said that when they opened the door of the prison they did not find anyone inside the prison. The apostles were all missing. When the high priest, the captain of the temple and the other leading priests heard this report, they were filled with confusion. They wondered what the final outcome of this would be. About that time, someone came from the temple and told the men of the Sanhedrin that the apostles were back in the temple and were teaching the people again.

Here, we see that the apostles were obedient to the words of Christ when His words were in conflict with the words of the Sanhedrin. Peter and John had told the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:19-20, “But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” They had said that it was impossible for them to keep quiet about the death and resurrection of Christ. We want to show our children by our example that it is also impossible for us to keep quiet about the death and resurrection of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:1-6 tells us that this is our most important message.

We go on to read in Acts 5:26-28, “Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!’” We see that the captain of the temple then went with the officers to the temple to get the apostles and bring them to the place where the Sanhedrin was meeting. We also see that the captain and the officers went with great fear. They

were afraid that the people might choose to stone them when they arrested the apostles again. Here, we see something that is often true. People without Christ will act out of fear because they are driven by the fear of people instead of being led by the love of Christ.

Once the apostles had been brought into the room and placed in front of the Sanhedrin, the high priest immediately began to question them. He said, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?” The high priest and all of the Sanhedrin had heard Peter and John say that it was more important for them to obey God than it was for them to obey men. They had heard them say that they could not keep quiet about the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Here, the high priest now asked them why they had not obeyed the Sanhedrin. In Acts 5:29, we see the answer of the apostles. That verse says, “But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’” We are to submit to our leaders when they do not command us to disobey God. However, when they command us to disobey God, we are to obey God and be ready to suffer the punishment of those men who are controlled by their own sin. That was the choice that the apostles had made.

The high priest also said that the apostles had filled Jerusalem with their teaching. We should have the same goal in the area where we are serving the Lord. We want all people to hear the good news of the death and resurrection of Christ. When Paul was in Ephesus, Acts 19:10 says, “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” Here, we see that the goal of Paul was for all of the people in the Roman province of Asia to hear about the death and the resurrection of Christ. The leaders of the early church give us a good example for our own lives and the lives of our children. We should have the same desire that all would know about Christ and His death and resurrection.

Then, the high priest told the apostles, “And (you) intend to bring this Man's blood on us!” Here, we see that the high priest and the Sanhedrin were actually trying to cover their own sin. These same religious leaders, as they stood before Pilate, said in Matthew 27:25, “And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood *be* on us and on our children.’” Now, they were trying to blame the apostles when they had spoken the words themselves. The high priest and the other religious leaders did not want to admit that they were guilty of condemning Christ. Instead, they tried to blame the apostles and say that the apostles were accusing them falsely. Sinful people never like to admit their sins.

The Lord showed clearly by bringing the apostles out of the prison that He was with them. Then, He showed that they could trust Christ and speak boldly for Him even to those who had condemned Christ to death. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that the Lord will be with them and give them the words to speak when they face opposition. We help our children to understand that they do not need to fear opposition as we show them how to depend on Christ for strength. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children for opposition and even persecution.