

## The Apostles Delivered From Prison

**Lesson Scope:** [Acts 5:17-42](#)

### Lesson Focus

Jesus' miraculous works were being reproduced by the apostles. From Jerusalem and surrounding cities, multitudes came for physical healing and release from demon possession. They believed the apostles' message of salvation through Jesus.

What was happening in the Name of Jesus proved one thing: Jesus, whom the Jewish leaders had crucified, was actually alive and continuing His work. The convicted consciences of these guilty leaders impelled them to persecute the apostles. They falsely accused the apostles of "[intending] to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28).

The angel's word to "go, stand and speak ... to the people" reaffirmed Jesus' parting words to His disciples: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20). The church lives and works by the power of God as she obeys this command.

The power of God on behalf of His faithful messengers is twofold. Sometimes God restrains evil men or miraculously delivers His people from their hands. Other times God empowers His messengers with courage and boldness to give His message in spite of persecution. His messengers are given Holy Spirit wisdom to answer their accusers. They are given joy as they identify with Christ in suffering. Emphasize to the class that the power comes by loyal obedience—obedience that springs from a love for God and His cause.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of Jesus Christ. Sinful men may oppose her message and abuse her messengers, but the Gospel will never be silenced.

**Lesson Aim:** To display God's power on behalf of His faithful messengers.

**Theme Verse:** [Psalm 27:1](#). The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

### **Lesson Text.**

#### **Released From Prison**

[Acts 5:17-28](#) <sup>17</sup> Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, <sup>18</sup> And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. <sup>19</sup> But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, <sup>20</sup> Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. <sup>21</sup> And when they heard *that*, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. <sup>22</sup> But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, <sup>23</sup> Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. <sup>24</sup> Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. <sup>25</sup> Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. <sup>26</sup> Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. <sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup> Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

#### **Empowered to Testify**

[Acts 5:29-32](#) <sup>29</sup> Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. <sup>31</sup> Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so* is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

## **Spared From Death**

**Acts 5:33-35** <sup>33</sup> When they heard *that*, they were cut *to the heart*, and took counsel to slay them. <sup>34</sup> Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; <sup>35</sup> And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

**Acts 5:38-42** <sup>38</sup> And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: <sup>39</sup> But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. <sup>40</sup> And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup> And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. <sup>42</sup> And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

## **Questions for Study**

### **Released From Prison**

1. For what purpose did God deliver the apostles from prison?
2. In what ways was the power of God manifested?
3. List and analyze the charges of the high priest against the apostles.
4. How does this account inspire our service to the Lord?

### **Empowered to Testify**

5. How did Peter's testimony answer the high priest's charges?
6. How does God enable His people to answer their accusers?
7. What results follow the believer's loyal obedience?

### **Spared From Death**

8. How does this account illustrate God's defense of His people?
9. Explain the reason for the apostles' joy.

## **Analyzing the Passage**

The council and senate (Acts 5:21) refer to the Sanhedrin, the seventy-member supreme Jewish court of justice, headed by the acting high priest. The Romans allowed the Sanhedrin to have its own officers, police force (captain, officers, Acts 5:26), and prison to deal with religious matters. The trial of the apostles, being an important matter, required the presence of

every member.

God demonstrated His power against this show of authority. The apostles, whom the Jews had imprisoned, were freed by an angel to continue preaching to the people.

Peter's answer to the high priest covered three major points. First, the authority and command of God superseded those of the council (Acts 5:29). Second, the message of the blood of Christ was not primarily one of condemnation, as the guilty high priest supposed. Instead, it was the blood of the covenant, provided for salvation and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31). Third, as to the matter of witnesses for the trial, many men were witnesses of Christ (more than the two or three required by Jewish law), and God Himself was a witness in the presence of His Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).

The pragmatism of Gamaliel (Acts 5:38-39) has often been quoted as truth. Actually, many false religions have prospered and grown. Truth is not determined by such evidence. Men of faith have a perspective different from Gamaliel's. His sole achievement was using his political expertise to quiet an angry mob and to prevent physical harm to the apostles.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Released From Prison**

1. Divine power exceeds that of earthly authorities (Acts 5:17-19, 22-23). Jethro's words to Moses concerning the Egyptians are true of all earthly opposition to God. "In the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them" (Exodus 18:11). Many imperial edicts have been issued against God's Word and His church, yet God has preserved them both.

2. God aids His people for the purpose of spreading the Gospel (Acts 5:19-21). The work of God is the salvation of souls (John 4:34-38). This work is the burden of every child of God. Like Paul, we are eager to glorify our Lord in any way He chooses, whether by life or by death (Philippians 1:20).

3. God sends His messengers early and often (Acts 5:21). "And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up [early], and sending" (2 Chronicles 36:15). Did the apostles get a vacation, a trip to the mountains, or a weekend at a cabin as a reward for their difficult night in prison? Oh, no! The work was too urgent; they resumed preaching early in the morning.

### **Empowered to Testify**

4. God grants His people wisdom to answer charges against them (Acts

5:29-32). "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:19-20). This ability comes by diligently studying and meditating on the Scriptures. "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all" (1 Timothy 4:15).

5. Only the obedient receive divine power (Acts 5:29, 32). Our relationship with Christ requires obedience. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love" (John 15:10). Jesus promised answers to prayer for those involved in doing His work (John 14:12-13). Obedience to the Father's commandment brings Christian joy: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

6. Believers receive courage to deliver an unpopular message (Acts 5:30--32). Sin and guilt are not popular subjects; a convicted but unyielding sinner is an unfriendly companion. Our flesh shrinks from others' resistance to our unwanted message. When we are committed to giving God's Word, He empowers us to do so.

7. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth of God's message through His servants (Acts 5:32). The Holy Spirit carries the truth of preaching and teaching into the conscience of the hearer. To the born-again believer, the new inner life and power from the Holy Spirit verify the truth of the Gospel.

### **Spared From Death**

8. According to His purpose, God restrains the evil intentions of the enemy (Acts 5:33-35, 38-40). God may limit Satan's persecution of the church to a short time (Revelation 2:10). He may entirely spare the faithful from a particular temptation (Revelation 3:10). God can and does use ungodly men in positions of power to accomplish His will in restraining evil.

9. The power of God is upon His faithful messengers, who rejoice to identify with Christ (Acts 5:41). No human source can give men inner joy, peace, and a forgiving spirit in the face of physical abuse or threats of death. The joy of the apostles was the work of the Spirit in response to the apostles' love and loyalty to Christ. Being beaten for His cause was nothing compared to Christ's sacrifice for them. They were glad to identify with Christ as His servants.

Do we love our identity with Christ? Do we love to say, "I am a Christian"? Can we tell others that we love a life of obedience to Christ? Do we

love the work of Christ more than our business? Could we rejoice to sell our business to avoid the snares of the Internet? Do we rejoice to live simply and humbly for the Gospel's sake? Identity with Christ affects all of life.

10. God empowers His messengers to serve with zeal (Acts 5:42). The apostles taught and preached every day in the temple and in private homes. Did they become weary? No; they ceased not! Do we support all the work of the church as zealously as we can? Or do we easily become weary?

### **Important Teachings**

1. Divine power exceeds that of earthly authorities (Acts 5:17-19, 22-23).
2. God aids His people for the purpose of spreading the Gospel (Acts 5:19-21).
3. God sends His messengers early and often (Acts 5:21).
4. God grants His people wisdom to answer charges against them (Acts 5:29-32).
5. Only the obedient receive divine power (Acts 5:29, 32).
6. Believers receive courage to deliver an unpopular message (Acts 5:30-32).
7. The Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth of God's message through His servants (Acts 5:32).
8. According to His purpose, God restrains the evil intentions of the enemy (Acts 5:33-35, 38-40).
9. The power of God is upon His faithful messengers, who rejoice to identify with Christ (Acts 5:41).
10. God empowers His messengers to serve with zeal (Acts 5:42).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. For what purpose did God deliver the apostles from prison?  
God delivered the apostles from prison so that they could continue to proclaim His message. The work of God is the salvation of souls (John 4:34-38).
2. In what ways was the power of God manifested?  
The apostles were delivered from prison in spite of all security measures. The apostles were also delivered from the fear of men as they proclaimed the message of power.
3. List and analyze the charges of the high priest against the apostles.  
(1) The high priest accused the apostles of violating a previous order of the

Sanhedrin to stop teaching in Jesus' Name. See Acts 4:18 for the previous edict. Instead, they had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine. This charge assumed the final authority of the Sanhedrin and reflected a religious system that claimed priority over truth. (2) The high priest accused the apostles of intending to bring Jesus' blood upon them. Perhaps he was implying that the apostles intended an overthrow of the Jewish order after they had gathered sufficient support. This reflected the Jewish leaders' guilty consciences, because a rational understanding of the Christian message made this conclusion impossible.

4. How does this account inspire our service to the Lord?

We see that God is in control of each situation we face and will use it for His glory if we are obedient. We are inspired from the earnestness of God's command, "Go," "stand," and "speak." From the announcement of the Great Commission to the great invitation of Revelation 22:17, we see God's passion for saving souls. We are inspired to give the Gospel message because it imparts life.

5. How did Peter's testimony answer the high priest's charges?

Peter's declaration of obedience to God rather than men rendered the high priest's command meaningless. Peter further explained that preaching the death and resurrection of Christ was not a matter of vengeance but of salvation.

6. How does God enable His people to answer their accusers?

The indwelling Holy Spirit brings the believer's knowledge of Scripture to his mind with God-given clarity to provide answers to the ungodly. For this reason we must study the Scriptures and meditate on them. Only as we rightly divide the Word of truth can we answer the arguments of those who twist the Scriptures.

7. What results follow the believer's loyal obedience?

Obedience assures our union with Christ, gives power in prayer, and fills the Christian with joy.

8. How does this account illustrate God's defense of His people?

God may use ungodly men to help His people. The reasoning of Gamaliel was unsound, yet God used it to accomplish His purpose. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 21:1).

9. Explain the reason for the apostles' joy.

God Himself, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, was the source of the apostles' joy. They rejoiced in their union with Christ. Their love for Christ

was such that they rejoiced to serve Him, to be identified with Him, and even to suffer for Him. They rejoiced that Christ accepted them as His servants.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

God has commissioned the church to spread His message. "Go, stand and speak ... all the words of this life" is still His command. God is looking for committed men who rejoice in suffering because they love their identity with Christ. God's men use every opportunity that freedom offers to teach and preach. God's men answer every question with their commitment, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

### **Research Guide**

Study John 14, 15 and 16. These chapters emphasize a relationship with Christ based on love and obedience, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and suffering as an identifying mark of union with Christ.