

The church was birthed at Pentecost and grew by thousands as the testimony spread throughout Jerusalem (Acts 5:14). The chief priests and Sadducees had detained Peter and John and questioned them. Peter was not intimidated. He boldly proclaimed that these leaders had killed the Author of Life (3:15). He told them that he had to speak of what he had seen and heard. Since that confrontation, healing miracles being done through the apostles were drawing more of the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas to become followers of Jesus. The Jewish leadership was feeling threatened by this growing movement that they could not control.

17 But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy 18 they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. Acts 5:17-18 They tried this before. I wonder what they thought they would do differently? The Sadducees in the Sanhedrin along with the high priest decided to put all the apostles in prison. Apparently, they could not convince the Pharisees to go along with them in this matter, probably due to the argument over whether there is a resurrection of the dead. Later Jewish writings will condemn anyone who does not believe in the resurrection,¹ but at this time it was an ongoing feud between these two branches of Judaism (Acts 23:6-8).

Notice that the motivation of the Sadducees is jealousy (James 3:16). Pontius Pilate discerned that it was the same motivation that caused them to deliver up Jesus for crucifixion (Matthew 27:18). We'll see the same reason of jealousy later in Acts for those who oppose Paul as he spreads the gospel (Acts 13:45). The influence of those in power was waning and that of these common laborers, followers of a crucified Messiah, was growing. The leaders must have thought, "How dare they think they can teach anyone! We are the educated elite that know what the masses should think." Now remember, even the shadow of Peter was healing the sick. A man lame from birth walked and leaped. These leaders know these things, and yet they are unwilling to listen to the message. To hear the message, they would have had to humble themselves and admit they were wrong in killing Jesus. To do so would mean the loss of their exalted positions and influence over the nation. Pride and manmade religiosity can keep us from facing our sins and leave us separated from God.

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." Acts 5:19-20 I used to call this a "Holy Ghost jail break." It still happens today. If you've read the account of brother Yun in China, even the newspapers there reported his escape from a maximum-security prison. His leg was broken and in great pain when the Holy Spirit told him to get up and walk out. His leg was healed and he walked right past guards and out the front gate that had been left slightly open.

An angel of the Lord was sent to break the apostles out of jail. Notice that the ESV translators capitalized Life. Remember that He said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) He is not just the source of life. He is Life. There is no life

Commented [PW1]: Acts 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

Commented [PW2]: Acts 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

Commented [PW3]: b. Sanh. 90b; m. Sanh. 10:1; m. Ber. 9:5

Commented [PW4]: Acts 23:6-8 (ESV)

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."

⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

Commented [PW5]: James 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Commented [PW6]: Matthew 27:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up.

Commented [PW7]: Acts 13:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

Commented [PW8]: John 11:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

apart from Him. In looking at it that way, the angel was repeating the command of Acts 1:8 and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The apostles were to be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, for it is the resurrection that validates all His claims, claims like being the resurrection and the life. They were to speak to the people all the words of *this* Life. In other words, they were to share the teachings of Jesus.

I always interpreted the expression to mean the life of following Jesus, the life of the church, and that is likely the correct interpretation.² But that is really the same thing as Jesus' life, for **the life of following Jesus is yielding to His life in us** (Galatians 2:20). We preach Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake, said the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 4:5).

In every religion, there are those who claim to be of a particular faith but don't believe its main tenants. There are many who claim to be Buddhists who are filled with all kinds of desire: desire for wealth, recognition, security, etc. There are many who claim to be Christians who know nothing of the life of Christ in them and live to please themselves. Other so called Christians think they can please God with their good works instead of gratefully receiving what Jesus has done for us.

The Lord was commanding the apostles to disobey the leadership of the nation. That must have been a heart pounding experience. Imagine Jesus breaking you out of jail and telling you to do what the court had ordered you not to do. While it was exciting and they must have had a sense of confidence knowing Jesus is greater in power than the rulers, yet they probably couldn't help but wonder where this was all leading, maybe to their own crucifixions. Most of them did eventually die as martyrs.

²¹ And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach. Acts 5:21a I really doubt they got any sleep after that jail break. They were waiting for the temple doors to open so they could obey Jesus' instructions. I bet those were some powerful messages that morning!

Meanwhile, *^{21b} Now when the high priest came, and those who were with him, they called together the council, all the senate of the people of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.* Acts 5:21b At one end of the Colonnade of Solomon was the chamber of hewn stone where meetings of the Sanhedrin were often held. It was probably there after their breakfasts and ritual baths that the council assembled. When they were all in place and ready to do business, the first order of the morning was dealing with the apostles of Jesus. So they sent to the prison to have them brought.

²² But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, ²³ "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them we found no one inside." Acts 5:22-23 The guards were standing there. The doors must have been solid as they would have sounded some alarm if they saw no one was in there. They opened the doors and there was no one inside! I can see the officer in charge looking with anger from guard to guard asking what in the world happened. The poor guards didn't have a clue. I don't know by what means Jesus freed the apostles, but the guards seem to have been completely

Commented [PW9]: Acts 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
Also see 1:22

Commented [PW10]: Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Commented [PW11]: "of this" *tautes* is in the feminine gender

Commented [PW12]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [PW13]: 2 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV)

⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

unaware, unlike those guards at the tomb of Jesus when He resurrected (Matthew 28:3-4). Those guards saw the resurrected Jesus and passed out!

²⁴ Now when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to. Acts 5:24
What do you do with an enemy who can walk out of jail unnoticed? What kind of power enables that to happen? If your best guards don't notice a thing, what is going on? Where will it all end? They had to wonder if they were fighting the real Messiah, how was this going to conclude?

Peter preached that the leaders had killed Jesus in ignorance (Acts 3:17), but are they still ignorant? If they paid Roman soldiers to lie about what happened (Matthew 28:11-13), saw a well-known man lame from birth get up and jump for joy, and now these followers of Jesus miraculously escaped jail and defied them seemingly without fear, how could they remain ignorant? What will this come to? Jewish writings tell us that even more is going on than is recorded in Scripture. The door to the Holy Place opens on its own each night and the eternal flame goes out. High Priest Caiaphas had to know about that. Knowing all this, they had decided to protect their positions and power.

²⁵ And someone came and told them, "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." Acts 5:25
Look toward the temple from the chamber of hewn stone down the Colonnade of Solomon and few hundred yards up the disciples are teaching the crowds who are gathering to hear more. Can you imagine the shock on those leaders faces? The apostles are doing just what Jesus told them to do, teaching all the words of His life. That is what a disciple does (John 20:21). They tell what their rabbi said and did. They repeat His teachings. In this case, they tell of His resurrection and all the signs that proclaimed He is the Messiah, along with the prophecies that were fulfilled in His life, death, and resurrection. They tell of His power to change their lives as well.

There were a lot of red faces in that chamber of hewn stone. "How dare they break out of jail and defy this august body of leaders! They didn't even hide or go somewhere else. They are taking over the temple grounds! Fishermen!" But what those leaders couldn't see or perceive is it is Christ in them. The very life of the One they killed is living in them proclaiming the truth. He is their strength and their song (Exodus 15:2).

²⁶ Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. Acts 5:26
"Would you kindly come and speak with the leaders of the nation?" The people were more astute at discerning that God was at work. They would have chosen these common laborers over their leaders if it came down to one or the other. God did not want a Jewish civil war. His grace and patience would extend for forty years. Then the Jews would choose a different messiah, a military leader, and all that they feared would come upon them. The temple would be destroyed. They would lose their positions. Most of them would be killed. What patience God has even with those who have seen so much evidence.

Commented [PW14]: Matthew 28:2-4 (ESV)

² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.

³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.

⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men.

Commented [PW15]: Acts 3:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

Commented [PW16]: Matthew 28:12-13 (ESV)

¹² And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers

¹³ and said, "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.'

Commented [PW17]: John 20:21 (ESV)

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

Commented [PW18]: Exodus 15:2 (ESV)

² The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Acts 5:27-28 Caiaphas plotted to have Jesus put to death in the most humiliating way that he could (John 11:49-50). He intimidated the Sanhedrin into going along and tried to find out who was not on board with him (John 18:19). He claimed it was to save the nation, but the real reason was to save his position and the income his family derived from the selling of animals and money exchanges in the temple courtyard. Most people knew what was going on. That is why the temple guards couldn't stop Jesus when He drove out the money changers (John 2:14-15). The people were on Jesus' side. That's why they didn't dare use force on the disciples now. Caiaphas is doing a political dance, backed by the Roman occupiers. He has force on his side. The Fortress of Antonia is right on the temple wall observing all the functions.

If they are indeed in the chamber of hewn stone, the crowd that was listening to the preaching could have stood on the perimeter and listened to what was being said. Caiaphas started his questioning with an accusation. "We strictly charged you not to teach and preach in the name of Jesus! Now you want to bring His blood upon us!" In fact, the apostles would have liked nothing better than for the Jewish leaders to have the blood of Jesus cover their sins (1 John 1:7). I wonder if Peter smiled when he heard that expression, "bring this man's blood upon us."

This conflict has continued ever since the Holy Spirit was poured out. We preach the good news and the prideful hear it as a threat. The selfish often hear it as condemnation of their ways rather than an invitation to life. All around the world believers are told not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. In Pakistan, there was only one parliamentarian who was a Christian. He argued for Assi Bibi's release and for a change in the Muslim blasphemy laws. He knew that law was a tool to falsely condemn to prison Christians who dared to speak and teach in the name of Jesus. He knew he would probably be martyred for taking that stand, and recently he was. A short time before he was killed, he is reported to have said he was ready to give his life for his stand for Christ. People die every day for their commitment to Christ.

Peter and the apostles weren't trying to get revenge. They weren't trying to hold Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin responsible. That was up to God. He is the judge (Romans 2:16). They were just obeying Jesus' command to go and speak all the words of this life. Peter didn't want them condemned. He wanted to see them saved.

Did Caiaphas forget that Peter's previous defense was that he had to be an honest witness? (Acts 4:19-20) That is what the Law demanded (Exodus 20:16). To order them not to do so was to act contrary to the very Law they were to uphold and enforce. But then, **power often corrupts judgment**. When judges act on their preferences rather than the Law they are sworn to uphold, lawlessness becomes official, and lawlessness is evil (Acts 2:23). Jealousy, power, and the lust for wealth had corrupted judgment then, just as it does now.

Commented [PW19]: John 11:49-50 (ESV)

⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all.

⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

Commented [PW20]: John 18:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

Commented [PW21]: John 2:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

Commented [PW22]: 1 John 1:7 (ESV)

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Commented [PW23]: Romans 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Commented [PW24]: Acts 4:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge,

²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

Commented [PW25]: Exodus 20:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Commented [PW26]: Acts 2:23 (ESV)

²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29

Peter boldly declared that the council was acting contrary to God's will. He stood his ground and declared that he would obey God when there is a conflict between God and government. And so should we all. God's law is the highest law! Once again, the Holy Spirit has inspired Peter with an answer that will pierce the hearts of those who are receptive.

Jews held in high regard a family that a generation before had led the revolt against Syria (Seleucids). When Syria occupied Israel, the Syrians tried to extinguish Judaism by making Jewish practices illegal and replacing them with Greek traditions. The Maccabee family were the first to defy them and led an uprising to resist. Some of the men of that family survived to lead a free nation of Israel and a renewal of keeping God's laws. Peter's words implied that these leaders had become more like the Syrians, after all, they were led by a Roman picked high priest who had ordered the death of the Messiah.

Pray for our politicians. The desire to be re-elected to maintain power and recognition can keep them from making the decisions they know are right. Just like these Jewish leaders, the right thing can be obvious, but it is tempting to hold on to one's position by compromising. They face enormous pressure and temptation to compromise.

Everyone faces the choice Caiaphas was making, in one way or another. The temptation to compromise to keep what is mine, to have my way, often puts our desires in conflict with the Holy Spirit and God's way. We ought to obey God rather than man, and man includes our own old natures. That man we obey rather than God can be ourselves. Are we hoping and praying for the opportunity to share the words of "this life"? Or are we hoping to avoid the situation so we can go our own way? Yielding to the life in Jesus in us is real life, an adventure. Will you look for opportunities to speak to the people all the words of this Life? Will you let Him live in you?

Questions

- 1 What led up to this event?
- 2 What is the stated motivation of the Sadducees?
- 3 Why could we think of the angel of the Lord as Jesus?
- 4 What does Jesus want us to teach?
- 5 How quickly did they obey?
- 6 Why the word "Look" in verse 25?
- 7 What fact demonstrates God's patience?
- 8 How guilty is Caiaphas?
- 9 Why is "blood upon us" ironic?
- 10 Who is the ultimate law giver?
- 11 Will you watch for opportunities to speak all the words of this Life?