

Acts Week 16

Rescued by an Angel

Acts 5:19-21; 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

21 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.

The disciples could have left town instead of going into the temple which they must have realized would bring more persecution upon them. However, they did not fear man; their fear was greater in thinking they would not be serving God as they believe themselves to be called to do. Leaving the jail and then preaching in the temple was surely cause to be stoned to death but in our Christ they had all the confidence they needed.

The pride of the leaders, Sanhedrin and the Pharisee, was filled with resentment, again they locked up Peter and John and now the other disciples with them. When we look at the attitude of the leaders we clearly see their resentment base in fear, fear of losing their clout, their power to sway the people, their false sense of fame. These individuals were slack in listening to God although He has given them many signs to change their way.

How would it affect you if those you had locked up somehow got out of jail, which would be an insult in itself. The disciples boldly and brazenly went back and began doing the very thing you sought to persecute them for doing? If we look at it as mortals I believe many would wish to see them punished, this was obviously how the leaders felt.

Have them brought

Verses 5:22-25; 22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, 23 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!” 24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. 25 So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!”

Surely this confused the leaders, who in their right mind would challenge them? What were these radicals trying to prove? The leaders failed to even consider God’s hand in all of this but sought instead to silence the disciples. How could they even admit the miracles these men had done, they performed healings in the streets, there could have been no way in which they had not heard about the day of Pentecost when so many believed.

Verses 26-28; 26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. 27 And when they had brought them,

they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 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!”

Brought them without violence for they feared the people.

Some may think it was the disciples who came without violence, that they did not struggle to get free fearing the punishment they might receive. I think as we read the Scripture we often fail to realize or understand that each of these events could be the end of their lives. Without fear the disciples went calmly back with the guards. It would be the leaders who had fear, this verse should be one we consider in all that is being said here. Those who feared the people were the leaders, the people were now believers having witnessed the healings that had been performed on the very streets on which they walked.

We need to look at both sides of the painting here. The leaders feared the people, they feared they may be stoned, but they did not fear the God of whom they were supposed to be serving. The disciples did not fear the leaders but instead our Lord God whom they have been chosen to sever. Strange how we can miss the point being made here as we often read right over the verses.

Asked again by the leaders why they were so insubordinate Peter responded, **verse 29, But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.** Back at the end of verse 28 the leaders accused the disciples of reporting to the people the truth, the blood of our Christ was on the leaders hands. We may look at this and wish it was not so, that pride would be cause to murder our Lord Jesus, why we ask. However, when we break it down we know from the Scripture it was God’s plan, God used their pride and arrogance to accomplish this part of our salvation. We had just looked at the fear of the leaders as they brought the disciples back and how they feared the people, and now we find the affirmation in the disciples' fear toward God, **“Obey God rather than man.”**

Murders

30-32; The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

The leaders believed themselves to be above all others, the complete opposite of our Christ Jesus. They feared the public so all they did regarding the judgment of the disciples was done behind the scenes afraid of the peoples retaliation, the pride offered them no strength nor did it ever change the facts of who Jesus was to them. To add to the insult Peter throws into the conversation, “We are His witnesses to these things.” Boldly they stood up for the truth.

The plot to Kill

33-39 - When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.

35 And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

So the idea of killing the disciples was halted and with a sensible warning from Gamaliel. Let this movement run its course if it is of God then we should have no part in it, if it is not then it will fall apart. This seems to be a situation that all of us face sometimes, we are so quick to make a decision without going to God or waiting on His reply, we find here Gamaliel’s direction one we all need to heed.

Sometimes and with the best of intentions we get in God’s way, we want to save the hurting and so we do things to solve the problem and things do not come out as we expected. God allowed all men to sin, man would have never sinned if God had not forbid it, in this God allows us to stumble, and He also allows us to come back and reach out to Him once again but pride gets in the way. Many of us have the desire to fix that broken wing but unless the bird learns how to fly it will continue to crash and sometimes this is where God is doing His work.

40-42; And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The disciples still took a beating but they did so with what appears to be a great joy, finding themselves worthy of suffering for our Lord. I think any of us here cannot begin to imagine what those beatings were like, could we do as they did? They did not hesitate in going right back to what they had been beaten for, they knew what they had been called to do,