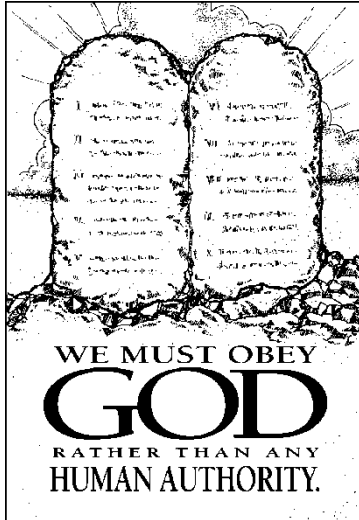


SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 9



ANGELS UNLOCK PRISON DOORS

Scripture Text: Acts 5:17-42

In our lesson today, we read of the second imprisonment of Peter and John. Thrown into prison by the jealous high priest and his associates, Peter and John were set free by an angel who commanded them to stand in the temple and speak again to the people the Word of God. The government leaders said, "Do not preach of Jesus." God said, "Go and preach of Jesus." We are justified in disobeying the government and its officials only if they make demands upon us that are contrary to our moral conscience. We must obey God rather than man.

The Holy Spirit had given the Apostles power, making them strong before the council. They were not afraid. They spoke clearly for Christ and the Gospel because they believed the message and knew what they talked about.

MEMORY VERSE: *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*

—Acts 5:29

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—1 John 2:1-17 Those who know God obey Him.
- Tue.—Isaiah 40:1-11 God strengthens His people.
- Wed.—Luke 9:46-56 Revenge is wrong.
- Thu.—Hebrews 11:23-38 Faith sustaining in persecution.
- Fri.—Matthew 5:38-48 Loving as God does.

Devotional Reading: Colossians 3:12-25 Forgiving as God does.

Go, Speak

Acts 5:17-21 The high priest—who did not believe Jesus was the Son of God—and all . . . with him . . . Sadducees—who did not believe in any resurrection—were filled with indignation. The rapid spread of the Gospel teaching made them angry. They imprisoned the Apostles. **The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors**—Man cannot stop God. **Said, Go . . . speak in the temple**—in contradiction of the rulers—the words of this life—the Gospel is a message of eternal life. The Apostles obeyed the Lord. A good Christian is a good citizen, but he is a good citizen only as long as he remains a good Christian, and he is not a good Christian if he transgresses his own conscience or allows the state to do so. The Master commanded to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but in the same command to render unto God the things that are God's (**Mark 12:17**). Let Christians obey Caesar, but let Caesar stay within his boundaries and not trespass the area that is God's. Let him be a servant; let him not try to be a master. We must remember that above Caesar stands God.

An Empty Prison

Acts 5:22-28 When the officers came—what a surprise! **The prison . . . shut . . . the keepers standing without . . . no man within.** The angel had worked invisibly, quietly, passed through locked doors—a miracle. **Came one and told . . . the men . . . are standing in the temple, and teaching.**

God thought the preaching of the Gospel of life in Christ so important that He sent an angel from Heaven on a special mission with instructions for the Apostles. What encouragement this must have been for them! They were to disobey legal orders—a risk of death—to preach in the temple, in court, in the street and everywhere.

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The captain himself went **with the officers**, fearing stoning, for the people favored the Apostles, seeing the miracles and the changed lives. **They set the Apostles before the council: and the high priest asked . . . Did not we straitly command you. . ? Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine**—unintended compliment to the Gospel's strength and their zeal. **Intend to bring this man's blood upon us.** It was already there (**Matthew 27:20-25**).

A Choice to Make

Acts 5:29-32 Peter and the other apostles answered . . . We ought to obey God rather than men—set the council's authority below God's. **God . . . raised up Jesus**—the Resurrection—**whom ye slew**—accused them. **Him . . . God exalted . . . a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance . . . and forgiveness**—straight to the vital point, naming Jesus as Savior and telling how to be saved. **We are his witnesses**—acknowledged their position. **So is also the Holy Ghost**—His witness was visible in miracles and in lives. He was glorifying Jesus Christ, which angered the rulers. **Whom (the Spirit) God hath given to them that obey him**—Jesus.

Here we see a group of Christians called upon to choose between God's command and the commands of the world. They were not the first to be called upon to make such a choice nor the last. In every generation, there are individuals and groups which are intent on stopping the spread of truth. Like the high priest and his gang, they assume this position because they want no true preacher or leader coming in to spoil their playhouse of self-esteem.

A Wise Suggestion

Acts 5:33-42 They were cut—their authority challenged, their sin revealed. Instead of yielding to conviction, they resisted. **Took counsel**—talked it over among themselves—**to slay them. Stood . . . up one in the council, a Pharisee**—of the strict, narrow, self-righteous sect, who were zealous for the law and their traditions—**Gamaliel**—a man learned in the law, a teacher (**Acts 22:3**). Gamaliel said, **let them alone: for if this . . . be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it**—a lesson to be learned in our day. To fight against God is a losing battle. The success or failure of this work was in itself; they could not change it. **They agreed.** They beat the Apostles and commanded, once again, to **not speak in the name of Jesus.** Love for the Lord transformed the suffering into a privilege and honor to the Apostles. They rejoiced to be **counted worthy** of it. They kept on preaching Christ regardless of the council's orders. When God allows persecution, He provides strength, courage, and joy to sustain them.

All through history, men in the name of Jesus Christ have been defying the laws of government. In the early days of the church, the government demanded all Christian believers to denounce Christ and accept idolatry. They refused, and many were killed. In the early days of the Protestant Reformation, thousands were given a choice between torture, sometimes death, and the renunciation of revealed truth and spiritual liberty they found in the Word of God. They resisted the tyranny of both church and state, and we are the benefactors of their gallant stand. We have the New Testament which the Apostles did not have. They wrote it!

JUST A THOUGHT

Look into the trusting eyes of a child and measure your responsibility.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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