

Acts 5 vv.12-16.

Along the sides of some of Jerusalem's streets there are to be seen many sick and afflicted people, both old and young, lying upon beds or mattresses. They have been carried thither by their friends or relations. Here lies a lame man, there a cripple, over there is one seriously ill with a high fever. More and more are brought and before long there is a great line of them. From time to time the sufferers look anxiously along the street. It seems that they are waiting for somebody.

Well now, what does it all mean? ... Why have all these afflicted people been brought here? ... Just pay attention, and you will learn the answer.

Look, there is a man approaching. The sun is shining brightly. The man is walking calmly along the street. He walks past the many sick people who lie there in long rows. His shadow passes over the numerous beds.

And what then? ... O, just look! As soon as the shadow has passed over any one of them, he stands up and is completely restored. The lame man springs to his feet, rolls up his bed and departs rejoicing. The cripple walks back to his home completely restored. If the shadow falls upon one who is seriously ill, then the fever subsides and he too returns home restored to health completely. How wonderful this is! How does it come about? ... Who is this passer by? ...

Take a careful look. This simple walker is - Peter, who is making for the temple or some particular house.

In those days wonderful things took place in Jerusalem, for not only Peter, but the other apostles too wrought great signs and wonders. All the afflicted, the blind, the dumb, cripples, and yes, even the devil-possessed and lepers were healed by the apostles in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth.

True the Jewish people <sup>had</sup> come to expect such things from the Lord Jesus. But now the disciples of the Nazarite are doing the same. Such a power goes forth from the apostles that if the shadow of Peter passes over the afflicted person as he walks along the street, they arise behind him.

The report of these wonderful healings is very soon made known far into the surrounding districts. Not only the sick from Jerusalem are brought to the apostles, but also those out of the cities round about are carried to the capital city, there to seek relief from their infirmities. And all of them, without exception, are healed.

That is why all those afflicted people were laid along the side of the streets. They hoped that they might be over-shadowed by Peter.

Is it surprising that all Jerusalem is talking about it? Everywhere the apostles are spoken of with awe and respect. In the Bible it says: "But the people magnified them."

Daily the apostles are preaching the risen Christ. They admonish the people to no longer reject Jesus. They point out to the multitudes the riches of grace in Christ Jesus. And their preaching is not in vain, for the Lord blesses their sermons to the hearts of many. Just read what God's Word tells us about it: "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. God's Spirit worked powerfully in the hearts of dead sinners.

No, the apostles could not grant salvation to any. Conversion is the work of God. They did however have to proclaim the Gospel. They had to show unto the Jewish people, Christ Crucified. But it was the Holy Ghost who made use of their preaching to the saving of many. What a blessed time that was.

None of the Jews dared to join himself unto the church, just for the purpose of advancing his own honour and glory, for the history of Annanias and Sapphira had been a warning for all hypocrites.

But those who in truth learned to know the Lord Jesus as their Surety and their Saviour, they were baptised. But the others dared not lightly join the church of God.

Just read this story over again in Acts chapter 5 verses 12-16. Make sure you do!

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#### Acts 5 vv.17-23.

The members of the Sanhedrin are very troubled. The recent happenings are worrying them. All is not well. Instead of the Name of ~~xx~~ Jesus of Nazareth being forgotten, all Jerusalem is moved by it. His Name is upon all lips.

Especially the Sadducees are filled with envy and wrath. Why them in particular? Well, it is quite simple. The Sadducees taught that there was no resurrection from the dead. And now behold, the disciples of the hated Nazarite are preaching the resurrection of that very Jesus. If that is the truth, then they are wrong. Then they are mistaken. But they will never admit their error, and that is why they are filled with envy.

The high priest, who is himself a Sadducee, stands up. He points out to the ~~man~~ members of the Sanhedrin the danger which threatens. At this rate it will not be long before all believe in that Name.

The Jewish leaders resolve to put a stop to it.

All the apostles are taken prisoner and shut up in the dungeon. It appears that it was then towards evening, because the Sanhedrin decides to meet again the following day in order to discuss the matter further.

For safety's sake guards are placed before the prison. They will ensure that the apostles cannot escape.

The next morning the Sanhedrin assembles once more. When they are all present the high priest commands some servants to go and fetch the prisoners. They are to give an account of themselves.

Look, there go some of the servants towards the prison. The guards stand at their post. They have watched faithfully the whole night, but nothing unusual has happened. They have not noticed anything, anyway.

"Open the door," resounds the command of the governor.

The bolts are thrown back, the prison door swings open and ... the dungeon is empty! The prisoners have vanished without trace!

The watchmen and the servants stare aghast ~~and~~ at the empty cell. How can it be? ... The watchmen have not slept for a moment. They are faced with an inexplicable mystery.

With their mission unaccomplished the servants return to the Sanhedrin.

"The prison truly found we shut with all safety," they report, "and the keepers standing without before the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within."

Can you not imagine their incredulous faces? ... But when the servants assure them that they are speaking the truth, then the leaders of the Jews become less resolute. Again something amazing - once more something inexplicable.

What has happened to the prisoners? ... Where are they? ... How have they got out of the prison? ... Why did the watchmen notice nothing? ...

All these questions arise within them, but they can think of an answer to none of them.

Do you know, boys and girls? ...

All at once somebody enters the chamber in which the Sanhedrin is assembled, and brings the news that the liberated apostles are in the temple preaching. The chief priests look at each other significantly. Irresistably the thoughts will have come to their minds: "By what means have the apostles then escaped from the prison?" And perhaps you are thinking the same thing.

We can read the answer to this question in the Bible. An angel of the Lord had opened the doors of the prison during the night, and the heavenly messenger had led the prisoners outside.

Yes ... but surely the watchmen were there outside? Had they not noticed them? No, it would seem that they had been struck with blindness. Their eyes were holden that they saw not what was taking place. Without the watchmen in the least realising it, the apostles had been set free.

The Angel commands them: "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." No, he does not tell them to hide themselves, but that they must continue to preach. They are to preach "the words of this life," which is to say, they are to proclaim to all the way of salvation through the Lord Jesus.

Just as though nothing had happened the disciples went the next morning to the temple, and while the Sanhedrin is assuming that they are still in the prison, they are already proclaiming the Gospel to a numerous multitude.

We may be sure that the Jewish leaders looked startled when they understood that the apostles were preaching in the temple.

At once the captain with the officers is sent to the Lord's house to fetch the apostles thence.

The officers obey, but do not dare to bring them by force, because the people take up a threatening attitude. Had they used violence, then very likely they would have been stoned. The apostles however accompany them willingly; at least they offered no resistance.

Soon afterwards they are standing before the Jewish council.

The high priest speaks with a sharp voice of annoyance: "Did we not 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."

Do you hear that? ... They say: "This man"! The high priest avoids the use of the name "Jesus" deliberately. This man! What contempt is coughed in

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those words. Yes, contempt indeed, but anxiety also! They had cried out "His blood be on us, and on our children," but yet they are frightened that the retribution for that innocent shed blood shall come upon them! This thought troubles them.

And what is the apostles' reply? ... Just listen!

"We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him ~~and~~ hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour." ... No, He did not remain dead, but is risen. He lives! "And we are his witnesses of these things." We have seen Him and spoken to Him, and it is this Jesus whom we preach to the people, for through Him only is forgiveness of sins possible. Yes, all who embrace Him by faith through the working of the Holy Ghost, receive forgiveness of sins in and through His blood.

No, the apostles do not fear. They feel the hatred and enmity, but that does not scare them off. On the contrary they freely confess their faith. The Holy Ghost fills their hearts.

When the Sanhedrin hears these words, there is a furious disturbance. Perhaps some of them even cried out in their blind hatred "Slay them!" They clench their fists in helpless anger. Yet deep in their hearts there is a gnawing anxiety. In the Bible it says that "they were cut to the heart". They take counsel among themselves to kill the apostles, so that they can no longer preach. That would put a stop to them.

Suddenly one of the Pharisees stands up. He wants to say something, and this is evidently the only way in which he can draw attention to himself, for probably he would not otherwise have made himself understood.

The murmur of voices stops, for they all respect this man. His name is Gamaliel. He is a doctor or teacher of the law.

"Put these men outside for a little while." Thus he commands the captain, as he indicates the apostles. His command is obeyed.

When the apostles have left the council chamber, he speaks: "Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men," and he goes on to say that if Jesus of Nazareth is indeed a deceiver, then it will all come to nothing in any case. There have indeed been other trouble-makers. They also had many followers to begin with, but it all came to nought. Those boasters are dead and their followers are scattered. Nothing has come of it all. "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; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

A moment's silence follows these solemn words. They all think over what they have heard. Then they agree to act on the counsel of Gamaliel.

The apostles are recalled to the chamber.

The furious Sadducees cannot however omit first to cool their hatred. They command the servants to beat the apostles.

Biting whiplashes descend upon the exposed bodies of the disciples.

After beating them, they command the apostles yet again to speak no more in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

They are then released and can therefore depart. They are free.

Groaning and writhing in agony, the apostles leave the Council chamber. ... No indeed, that is not at all what is written. Just read it. They do not in the least complain, but rather they rejoice. Rejoice! ... Did they feel no pain then from the beating? Of course it was painful. The pain cuts through their bodies, and yet they rejoice. They esteem it an honour "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame " for the Name of their beloved Master.

But now surely the apostles will be more careful, will they not? ... O, indeed? ... Is that what you think? ... Then you are mistaken!

We read: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to ~~teach~~ teach and to preach Jesus Christ."

Is the Name and service of the Lord worth so much to you, too? ... Alas, no! Many cannot endure just one word of ridicule. Is that not true sometimes? ... Now, boys and girls, be honest about it! Would you dare to confess Him, if you were to be hated and ridiculed? ... Alas, most would not. Many are silent when they ought to speak, yes, even worse, many join in the mockery, so as to avoid the ridicule of their comrades.

The Lord make you faithful, that you may never deny your profession.