

The Apostle's Second Test

The apostles continued their practice of teaching in the entry porch of the Temple known as Solomon's Porch, from about sunrise to near sunset. The disciples used this part of the Temple because Jesus had taught there. "It was the only part of Solomon's Temple left uninjured by the Babylonians and survived apparently till the destruction of the Temple by Titus A.D. 70" (Josephus, *Ant.* XX. 9, 7). Peter and John continued to preach the resurrected Jesus even though the Sanhedrin commanded them not to teach that name (Acts 4:18).

You can imagine the emotional heat rising among the High Priest and his fellow Saduscees as their commands were ignored. The Pharisees did not seem to be bothered by the apostle's teaching. Much later, Paul used that difference in concern to set the two sects of the Jews against each other, Acts 23:6-7. But as the Saduscees continued to see and hear of spiritual matters discussed, they ordered the apostles to be taken into custody once again. *"They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail"* (Acts 5:18). The "public jail" might be like a "holding cell" of today, a place to hold people in custody and observe them until the judge could see them.

Remember, Peter had said, *"Is it right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:19-20). Then, as they waited in the public jail, *"An angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 'Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.'"* (Acts 5:19-20). With this confirmation that they were doing Christ's will, they gladly obeyed, and began their teaching at dawn as usual.

When the assembled council called for the prisoners, they were not in confinement. Everything was still locked securely, but no one was there. Those in charge became worried as to what would happen. *"But someone came and reported to them, 'The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!'"* (Acts 5:25). When the officers of the Temple escorted Peter and John back before the council, the questioning was not about the escape. They did not want to hear anything about a miracle, which this event was. Their interest was only in their power to command and control the people.

The high priest said, *"We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us"* (Acts 5:28). Peter's response is a condensed version of what Stephen and later, Paul will say in their defense speeches. *"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him"* (Acts 5:30-32). What more could be shown to the council to demonstrate that God and His Holy Spirit were with these men? They ignored the fact that within a few hours, a lame man was healed, and prisoners were released, all with no evidence of human assistance.

The primary job given to an apostle was to preach the risen Christ (Acts 1:22). Peter and John had done that since the first sermon on Pentecost and continued that throughout their lives. The witness of the Holy Spirit appeared in wonders on Pentecost, in healing the lame, and the release from prison. Rather than accept the truth and bow to God's demonstrated will, the council returned to a

policy of violence. When the Sanhedrin heard the words spoken by Peter, *"They were cut to the quick and intended to kill them"* (Acts 5:33). Remember, when they heard of the raising of Lazarus by Jesus, *"from that day on they planned together to kill Him"* (John 11:53). The Sanhedrin took the advice of Caiaphas seriously and plotted the death of Jesus (John 11:49-50). Even the words of Caiaphas, the high priest, came from the Holy Spirit.

The man who taught Paul in matters of the Law, Gamaliel, gave good advice to the council. *"Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men ... if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God"* (Acts 5:34-39). The Council of the Sanhedrin had Peter and John flogged, beaten so that the skin was broken, and once more, *"ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them"* (Acts 5:40). The apostles continued: *"Every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"* (Acts 5:42).

What are we willing to suffer to spread the gospel?