

Holy Rescue



When I was a senior in high school at Mountain View Academy, our school took a ski trip. Our group stayed in two locations – most stayed at a ski lodge and a few of us senior boys got to stay with one of our favorite teachers in his family’s cabin.

One of the evenings, there were a bunch of activities planned at the lodge for us – interactive games and stuff. Us guys were really tired and just wanted to go to bed, so our teacher brought us back to the cabin with the instructions that we were not to watch TV, but we were to go to bed.

A few of us went right to bed; but, there were a couple who turned on the TV. When they heard the teacher returning after a while, they turned it off, jumped into bed, and pretended to be asleep.

Our teacher came in and rested his hand on the TV and it was warm – it was obvious it had been on for a while.

He got us all out of bed and chewed us out – even those of us who had followed his instructions were in trouble. I don’t remember what all the consequences were, but I was a bit ticked off – I had done what I was supposed to do. I had obeyed and gone right to bed and now I was lumped in with the offenders.

Have you ever gotten in trouble for doing the right thing? There are few things that feel more unfair. In James 1, we read:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. (James 1:2, NLT)

Is he grounded in reality? And then, in 1 Peter 4 it says:

Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad ... (1 Peter 4:12-13, NLT)

Are you serious? Are these guys crazy? This doesn’t even sound good in theory, does it? Trouble – “an opportunity for great joy”? ... “Be very glad”? Imagine this on a poster - probably wouldn’t sell many of them!



The Early Days

So far in the book of Acts we have seen a wonderful picture of God at work. We noted the time Jesus spend with His followers after



His resurrection. We saw the Holy Spirit poured out and thousands converted and baptized.

We examined the love and generosity of the early Christians as they shared their resources of time and money to help those in need. They demonstrated Jesus' love with their actions. In Acts 5, Luke paints a beautiful picture of those early days:

The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade. But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high regard for them.

Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord – crowds of both men and women. As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5:12-16, NLT)

Trouble

But, there was trouble brewing – there usually is when God's Spirit is making difference in people's lives.

The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. (Acts 5:17, NLT)

The same people who fought against Jesus and brought about His death, were not happy with this new development.

This verse helps us understand a bit why they were so upset – it tells us they were Sadducees.

Sadducees were the liberal Jews; they had accommodated the Roman rulers, so they could retain their power.

They did not believe in a coming judgement or in resurrection. As a result, most were wealthy and lived for whatever they could get out of this life.

They were a small minority but were among the most powerful leaders. Annas and Caiaphas were both Sadducees.

The main message of the Apostles was that the rulers of Israel had murdered Jesus – in accordance with Bible prophecy, and He had been resurrected. This idea terrified the Sadducees. If this was true, they would be held accountable for their actions and the eternal results were not pleasant.

The Pharisees, the conservative side, believed in resurrection but refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah. They had convinced themselves they were acting on God's behalf. In their minds they were keeping the faith pure and protecting the unsuspecting masses from this horrible deception. So ...

*They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.
(Acts 5:18, NLT)*

We don't know if they were all arrested, or it was only some of them. We do know Peter was among the group because he acted as the spokesman – as we'll see a little later in the story. Reading on:

But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!"

So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

(Acts 5:19-21, NLT)



It must have been surprising to the people who had watched them get arrested the afternoon before to see them teaching again, first thing in the morning – but there they were!

It was also an assurance from God that regardless of what happened to them in the future, everything was under God's control. They could be sure that God was working in them and through them to most effectively share the good news of His love and salvation.

Meanwhile, the council was called into session; everyone was briefed; and the guards were sent to the jail to bring the Apostles. They found everything in order – guards in place, door locked, etc. – but no Apostles. They went back to the council and reported their discovery.

While they were trying to figure it out what to do next, someone came and reported that the Apostles were teaching in the Temple.

Response

This should have served as a warning, but it was not heeded, and the Temple guards were sent to arrest them again – which they did with politeness. The Apostles were brought straight in before the council. And the High Priest said:

"We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name! ... Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him." (Acts 5:28-32, NLT)

As you might imagine, they were less than pleased. In fact, they were so angry, they would have killed them right there, right then had it not been for an unexpected voice of reason.

Gamaliel, a highly respected expert in religious law, asked for the men be put outside the council chamber and then addressed the group.

He gave a couple of examples of people who made big claims and had excited lots of people. They had each failed and faded away. He concluded with these words:

“So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!” (Acts 5:38-39, NLT)

His advice was accepted. They had the apostles flogged, ordered them to never speak in Jesus name again, and then released them.

They did come away alive, but we tend to gloss over the flogging. This wasn't 50 lashes with a wet noodle. This was a serious beating with deep bruising and ripped flesh.

Luke then concludes the story with these words:

The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.” (Acts 5:41-42, NLT)

Lessons

Early in His ministry, Jesus spoke these words:

“God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” (Matthew 5:10-12, NLT)

Looking back at that crazy passage from James we read earlier – only this time in context:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4, NLT)

The joy is not because trouble has found us, but because of where it can take us. Peter's message is similar:

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad – for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. (1 Peter 4:12-13, NLT)

The book of Hebrews tells us that suffering even played an important role in Jesus' life:

Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ... (Hebrews 5:8-9, CSB)

If suffering played an important part in making Jesus into who He was supposed to be, it's probably important to us too.

Suffering brings us into a partnership with Jesus. It shapes our lives making us more like Him.

Peter and the Apostles were living out their lives in the same way Daniel and his friends did many years earlier. They were following the advice of Proverbs 3, where it says:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV)

When Peter told the authorities:

"We must obey God rather than any human authority ..." (Acts 5:29, NLT)

He was saying He trusted God and would always submit to Him over people – whatever the consequences. And when Luke reported that:

... Every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah." (Acts 5:42, NLT)

It showed that Peter and the other Apostles were backing up their words with action!

They were looking beyond this life into eternity. Because they knew they were following God and had already seen His power at work, they were not worried about what this world could do to them. They knew they had a secure future with Jesus!

Perhaps the most important thing trouble can teach us is that this world is not our home. We are made for something much better. Jesus said:

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (John 16:33, NLT)

Trouble keeps us from getting too comfortable here and directs our thoughts to Jesus and eternity. And for that, we can be thankful, maybe even joyful.

Notes

Text you find in **this color** is a link to more information. It may take you to the Bible verse in context and/or in several different translations utilizing BibleGateway.com. In some cases, it may take you to a website where there is additional information. And, it may take you to a PDF copy of previous sermons in this series.

Previous Sermons in this Series – click on the title to access it.

1. January 6, 2018: **The End - The Beginning**
2. January 20, 2018: **Holy Fire**
3. January 27, 2018: **Holy Love**
4. February 17, 2018: **Holy Boldness**
5. February 24, 2018: **Un-Holy Deception**
6. March 31, 2018: **Holy Gift**
7. April 7, 2018: **Holy Response**

Scripture References

Proverbs 3:5-12 (NIV): *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

⁷ *Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. ⁸ This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*

⁹ *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

¹¹ *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, ¹² because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. (Proverbs 3:5-12, NIV)*

Matthew 5:1-12 (NLT): *One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ² and he began to teach them.*

³ *"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*

⁴ *"God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

⁵ *"God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.*

⁶ *"God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.*

⁷ *"God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

⁸ *"God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.*

⁹ “God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.

¹⁰ “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

¹¹ “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” (Matthew 5:1-12, NLT)

Matthew 5:43-48 (NLT): “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48, NLT)

Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT): Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT)

Matthew 11:28-30 (the Message): Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” (Matthew 11:28-30, the Message)

John 13:34-35 (NLT): “So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35, NLT)

John 14:27-29 (NLT): “I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. ²⁸ Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. ²⁹ I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe. (John 14:27-29, NLT)

John 15:18 – 16:4 (NLT): “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. ¹⁹ The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. ²⁰ Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. ²¹ They will do all this to you because of me, for they

have rejected the one who sent me.²² They would not be guilty if I had not come and spoken to them. But now they have no excuse for their sin.²³ Anyone who hates me also hates my Father.²⁴ If I hadn't done such miraculous signs among them that no one else could do, they would not be guilty. But as it is, they have seen everything I did, yet they still hate me and my Father.²⁵ This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: 'They hated me without cause.'

²⁶ "But I will send you the Advocate – the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me.²⁷ And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry.

16 "I have told you these things so that you won't abandon your faith.² For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God.³ This is because they have never known the Father or me.⁴ Yes, I'm telling you these things now, so that when they happen, you will remember my warning. I didn't tell you earlier because I was going to be with you for a while longer. (**John 15:18 – 16:4**, NLT)

John 16:31-33 (NLT): Jesus asked, "Do you finally believe?"³² But the time is coming – indeed it's here now – when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.³³ I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (**John 16:31-33**, NLT)

Acts 2:43-47 (NLT): A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity –⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (**Acts 2:43-47**, NLT)

Acts 4:32-37 (NLT): All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had.³³ The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all.³⁴ There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them³⁵ and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

³⁶ For instance, there was Joseph, the one the apostles nicknamed Barnabas (which means "Son of Encouragement"). He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus.³⁷ He sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles. (**Acts 4:32-37**, NLT)

Acts 5:12-42 (NLT): The apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade.¹³ But no one else dared to join them, even though all the people had high

regard for them.¹⁴ Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord – crowds of both men and women.¹⁵ As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by.¹⁶ Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

The Apostles Meet Opposition

¹⁷ The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.¹⁹ But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them,²⁰ "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!"

²¹ So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council – the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial.²² But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported,²³ "The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!"

²⁴ When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end.²⁵ Then someone arrived with startling news: "The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!"

²⁶ The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them.²⁷ Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them.²⁸ "We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name!" he said. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority.³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross.³¹ Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven.³² We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him."

³³ When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them.³⁴ But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while.³⁵ Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men!³⁶ Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various

ways. The whole movement came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

³⁸ “So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”

⁴⁰ The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. ⁴² And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: “Jesus is the Messiah.” (Acts 5:12-42, NLT)

Romans 8:26-30 (NLT): And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷ And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will. ²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory. (Romans 8:26-30, NLT)

Philippians 2:5-11 (NLT): You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11, NLT)

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NLT): So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. (Hebrews 4:14-16, NLT)

Hebrews 5:7-10 (CSB): *During his earthly life, he offered prayers and appeals with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.*

⁸ Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. ⁹ After he was perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰ and he was declared by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10, CSB)

James 1:2-4 (NLT): *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4, NLT)*

1 Peter 4:12-19 (CSB): *Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. ¹⁶ But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name.*

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

¹⁹ So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good. (1 Peter 4:12-19, CSB)

1 Peter 4:12-19 (the Voice): *Dear ones, don't be surprised when you experience your trial by fire. It is not something strange and unusual, ¹³ but it is something you should rejoice in. In it you share the Anointed's sufferings, and you will be that much more joyful when His glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If anyone condemns you for following Jesus as the Anointed One, consider yourself blessed. The glorious Spirit of God rests on you. ¹⁵ But none of you should ever merit suffering like those who have murdered or stolen, meddled in the affairs of others or done evil things. ¹⁶ But if you should suffer for being a Christian, don't think of it as a disgrace, as it would be if you had done wrong. Praise God that you're permitted to carry this name.*

¹⁷ For the time for judgment has come, and it is beginning with the household of God. If it is starting with us, what will happen to those who have rejected God's good news? ¹⁸ It is written in Proverbs, "If it is hard for the righteous ones to be saved, what will happen to the ungodly and the sinners?"

¹⁹ So even if you should suffer now for doing God's will, continue doing good and trust your futures to the judgment and mercy of a faithful Creator. (1 Peter 4:12-19, the Voice)

E.G. White Quotations

The Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8, Before the Sanhedrin, pages 77-86: *It was the cross, that instrument of shame and torture, which brought hope and salvation to the world. The disciples were but humble men, without wealth, and with no weapon but the word of God; yet in Christ's strength they went forth to tell the wonderful story of the manger and the cross, and to triumph over all opposition. Without earthly honor or recognition, they were heroes of faith. From their lips came words of divine eloquence that shook the world.*

In Jerusalem, where the deepest prejudice existed, and where the most confused ideas prevailed in regard to Him who had been crucified as a malefactor, the disciples continued to speak with boldness the words of life, setting before the Jews the work and mission of Christ, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Priests and rulers heard with amazement the clear, bold testimony of the apostles. The power of the risen Saviour had indeed fallen on the (Page 78) disciples, and their work was accompanied by signs and miracles that daily increased the number of believers. Along the streets where the disciples were to pass, the people laid their sick "on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." Here also were brought those vexed with unclean spirits. The crowds gathered round them, and those who were healed shouted the praises of God and glorified the name of the Redeemer.

The priests and rulers saw that Christ was extolled above them. As the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection, heard the apostles declaring that Christ had risen from the dead, they were enraged, realizing that if the apostles were allowed to preach a risen Saviour, and to work miracles in His name, the doctrine that there would be no resurrection would be rejected by all, and the sect of the Sadducees would soon become extinct. The Pharisees were angry as they perceived that the tendency of the disciples' teaching was to undermine the Jewish ceremonies, and make the sacrificial offerings of no effect.

Hitherto all the efforts made to suppress this new teaching had been in vain; but now both Sadducees and Pharisees determined that the work of the disciples should be stopped, for it was proving them guilty of the death of Jesus. Filled with indignation, the priests laid violent hands on Peter and John, and put them in the common prison.

The leaders in the Jewish nation had signally failed of fulfilling God's purpose for His chosen people. Those (Page 79) whom the Lord had made the depositaries of truth had proved unfaithful to their trust, and God chose others to do His work. In their blindness these leaders now gave full sway to what they called righteous indignation against the ones who were setting aside their cherished doctrines. They would not admit even the possibility that they themselves did not rightly understand the word, or that they had misinterpreted or misapplied the Scriptures. They acted like men who had lost their reason. What right have these teachers, they said, some of them mere fishermen, to present ideas contrary to the doctrines that we have taught the people? Being determined to suppress the teaching of these ideas, they imprisoned those who were presenting them.

The disciples were not intimidated or cast down by this treatment. The Holy Spirit brought to their minds the words spoken by Christ: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me." "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." John 15:20, 21; 16:2, 4.

The God of heaven, the mighty Ruler of the universe, took the matter of the imprisonment of the disciples into His own hands, for men were warring against His work. By night (Page 80) the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and said to the disciples, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." This command was directly contrary to the order given by the Jewish rulers; but did the apostles say, We cannot do this until we have consulted the magistrates and received permission from them? No; God had said, "Go," and they obeyed. "They entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught."

When Peter and John appeared among the believers and recounted how the angel had led them directly through the band of soldiers guarding the prison, bidding them resume the work that had been interrupted, the brethren were filled with amazement and joy.

In the meantime the high priest and those with him had "called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel." The priests and rulers had decided to fix upon the disciples the charge of insurrection, to accuse them of murdering Ananias and Sapphira, and of conspiring to deprive the priests of their authority. They hoped so to excite the mob that it would take the matter in hand and deal with the disciples as it had dealt with Jesus. They were aware that many who did not accept the teachings of Christ were weary of the arbitrary rule of the Jewish authorities and anxious for some change. The priests feared that if these dissatisfied ones were to accept the truths proclaimed by the apostles, and were to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the anger of the entire people would be raised against the religious leaders, who would then be made to answer (Page 81) for the murder of Christ. They decided to take strong measures to prevent this.

When they sent for the prisoners to be brought before them, great was their amazement at the word brought back that the prison doors were found to be securely bolted and the guard stationed before them, but that the prisoners were nowhere to be found.

Soon the astonishing report came, "Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned."

Although the apostles were miraculously delivered from prison, they were not safe from examination and punishment. Christ had said when He was with them, "Take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils." Mark 13:9. By sending an angel to deliver them, God

had given them a token of His love and an assurance of His presence. It was now their part to suffer for the sake of the One whose gospel they were preaching.

In the history of prophets and apostles, are many noble examples of loyalty to God. Christ's witnesses have endured imprisonment, torture, and death itself, rather than break God's commands. The record left by Peter and John is as heroic as any in the gospel dispensation. As they stood for the second time before the men who seemed bent on their destruction, no fear or hesitation could be discerned in their words or attitude. And when the high priest said, "Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in (Page 82) this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us," Peter answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men." It was an angel from heaven who delivered them from prison and bade them teach in the temple. In following his directions they were obeying the divine command, and this they must continue to do at whatever cost to themselves.

Then the Spirit of Inspiration came upon the disciples; the accused became the accusers, charging the murder of Christ upon those who composed the council. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus," Peter declared, "whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

So enraged were the Jews at these words that they decided to take the law into their own hands and without further trial, or without authority from the Roman officers, to put the prisoners to death. Already guilty of the blood of Christ, they were no eager to stain their hands with the blood of His disciples.

But in the council there was one man who recognized the voice of God in the words spoken by the disciples. This was Gamaliel, a Pharisee of good reputation and a man of learning and high position. His clear intellect saw that the violent step contemplated by the priests would lead to terrible consequences. Before addressing those present, he (Page 83) requested that the prisoners be removed. He well knew the elements he had to deal with; he knew that the murderers of Christ would hesitate at nothing in order to carry out their purpose.

He then spoke with great deliberation and calmness, saying: "Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. 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."

The priests saw the reasonableness of these views, and were obliged to agree with Gamaliel. Yet their prejudice and hatred could hardly be restrained. Very reluctantly, after beating the disciples and charging them again at the peril of their lives to preach no more in the name of Jesus, they released them. "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." (Page 84)

Shortly before His crucifixion Christ had bequeathed to His disciples a legacy of peace. "Peace I leave with you," He said, "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27. This peace is not the peace that comes through conformity to the world. Christ never purchased peace by compromise with evil. The peace that Christ left His disciples is internal rather than external and was ever to remain with His witnesses through strife and contention.

Christ said of Himself, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Matthew 10:34. The Prince of Peace, He was yet the cause of division. He who came to proclaim glad tidings and to create hope and joy in the hearts of the children of men, opened a controversy that burns deep and arouses intense passion in the human heart. And He warns His followers, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake." "Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death." John 16:33; Luke 21:12, 16.

This prophecy has been fulfilled in a marked manner. Every indignity, reproach, and cruelty that Satan could instigate human hearts to devise, has been visited upon the followers of Jesus. And it will be again fulfilled in a marked manner; for the carnal heart is still at enmity with the law of (Page 85) God, and will not be subject to its commands. The world is no more in harmony with the principles of Christ today than it was in the days of the apostles. The same hatred that prompted the cry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" the same hatred that led to the persecution of the disciples, still works in the children of disobedience. The same spirit which in the Dark Ages consigned men and women to prison, to exile, and to death, which conceived the exquisite torture of the Inquisition, which planned and executed the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and which kindled the fires of Smithfield, is still at work with malignant energy in unregenerate hearts. The history of truth has ever been the record of a struggle between right and wrong. The proclamation of the gospel has ever been carried forward in this world in the face of opposition, peril, loss, and suffering.

What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered persecution for Christ's sake? It was union with God, union with the Holy Spirit, union with Christ. Reproach and persecution have separated many from earthly friends, but never from the love of Christ. Never is the tempest-tried soul more dearly loved by His Saviour than when he is suffering reproach for the

truth's sake. "I will love him," Christ said, "and will manifest Myself to him." John 14:21. When for the truth's sake the believer stands at the bar of earthly tribunals, Christ stands by his side. When he is confined within prison walls, Christ manifests Himself to him and cheers his heart with His love. When he suffers death for Christ's sake, the Saviour says to him, They may kill the body, but they cannot hurt the soul. "Be of good cheer; I (Page 86) have overcome the world." "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." John 16:33; Isaiah 41:10.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever." "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in His sight." Psalms 125:1-3; 72:14.

"The Lord of hosts shall defend them ... the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land." Zechariah 9:15, 16. (The Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8, Before the Sanhedrin, pages 77-86)