**The Anger of Israel’s Religious Leaders**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

One day a man was walking along the beach when suddenly he tripped over a magic lamp. Not *knowing* that it was a magic lamp, though, he got angry and *kicked* it. Seconds later, a magic genie appeared, and *he too* was angry that his lamp had been kicked.

So he said to the man, “I still have to give you three wishes, but since you kicked me, whatever I give you I’m *also* going to give twice as much to someone you really hate. So the man wished for a million dollars and got it, but sure enough, the genie gave *two* million dollars to the man’s *boss,* who evidently he didn’t care for too much. Then the man wished for a sports car and a Ferrari appeared in his driveway, but a Ferrari *and a Porsche* appeared in his boss’s driveway.

Then the genie said to the man, “This is your last wish, so choose carefully.” The man smiled and said, “Now I wish you would *beat me half to death.”*

Speaking of getting *angry,* if you’ve been following along with our studies in Acts you know that the twelve apostles here in Acts 5 have been healing anyone and everyone who came to them for healing (Acts 5:15,16). This made them *very* popular with the people in Jerusalem, but it also made Israel’s religious leaders *very angry,* as we see in the opening verse of our text in Acts 5:17-28:

**“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation” (Acts 5:17).**

Now that word “indignation” isn’t one we use much, but it’s just another word for *anger.* But it’s the “How dare you?” kind of anger that the genie showed in our opening story when he wondered how the man had dared to kick his lamp. It’s the “Who do you think you are to do that to me?” kind of anger, and our text tells us that Israel’s religious leaders were *full of it.* Which is interesting, since we know that *the apostles* were “all filled *with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 2:4).

That got me to thinking about how that’s a choice we have to make as well. I mean, you can go through life being *indignant* if you want to, thinking “How dare you?” every time someone kicks *your* lamp, or whatever *you* hold dear, or makes you angry in some other way. But what you should do instead is “be filled with the Spirit” (Acts 5:18).

Now you’re never going to be filled with the Spirit like they were, to where they literally *could not sin* (I Jo. 3:19). But in the measure that you *are* filled with the Spirit, in that measure you can keep from getting indignant. And that will make you *a whole lot happier in life,* I guarantee it!

Of course, *getting* filled with the Spirit is a little harder for you than it was for the apostles. They just had to wait around for Him to come on the day of Pentecost, as the Lord promised He would. If *you* want to overcome things like anger in your life, you have to do what Paul told the Colossians to do and

**“…*be filled with the knowledge of His will* in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing*…” (Colossians 1:9,10).**

Doesn’t walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing sound like something someone filled with the Spirit would do? Of course! That means the only way to keep yourself from getting indignant, and please the Lord in all other ways, is to be *filled with a knowledge of His will!* There just aren’t any shortcuts to being filled with God’s Spirit! You have to invest the time to read and study God’s Word.

Now if you’re wondering *why* these religious leaders were indignant, it was because they’d been Israel’s leaders for an *awfully* long time, and they were *angry* at the thought that the apostles were getting so popular with the people that they might *replace* them as Israel’s leaders. So they decided to do something about it before it got out of hand, something we read about in the next verse in our text, where after Luke tells us they were indignant, he wrote,

**“And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison” (Acts 5:18).**

Now when it says they “laid hands” on the apostles, it means they *arrested* them. And this wasn’t the first time they arrested them! Back in Chapter 4, we saw that

**“...the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. *And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold* unto the next day…” (Acts 4:1-3).**

Now notice that it was *the Sadducees* who kept arresting the apostles. That’s because “the Sadducees…*say that there I no resurrection”* (Mt. 22:23)—that’s why they were sad, you see! That’s an old joke, but think about it! How sad would it be to think that this life is all there is? But when the twelve apostles started preaching the resurrection *of the Lord Jesus Christ,* the Sadducees were no longer *sad,* they got *mad,* and had the apostles arrested and put “in hold.” That sounds like they imprisoned them in some sort of private lockup.

But when the apostles *kept* preaching the resurrection of Christ, they went past being mad and got *indignant,* and arrested them *again.* This time, however, they put them in “the common prison,” alongside prisoners who weren’t just in jail for preaching something.

Imagine how *embarrassing* that was! If you ever start thinking that *you* have to suffer embarrassment for standing for the Lord, imagine having to spend the night in jail with petty thieves, and men who were arrested for being drunk and disorderly, or even for indecent exposure! Not to mention the *danger* of having to spend the night in the common prison if it held prisoners like rapists and murderers!

But this means these leaders in Israel were stepping up their resistance to the apostles, since the apostles were stepping up their ministry by refusing to back down from preaching the resurrected Christ. And as we read on in our text, we see how *the Lord* felt about their arrest and incarceration:

**“But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,**

**“Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:19,20).**

When those religious leaders stepped up their resistance to the twelve, the Lord stepped up His *support* of the twelve by sending an angel to bust them out of jail. Now we’re not told who this angel was, but that exact phrase “the angel of the Lord” sometimes referred to a theophany, an Old Testament appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ before His birth in Bethlehem. We see one such occurrence when He appeared to Moses, as we read in Exodus 3:2-6,

**“…*the angel of the LORD* appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and…*God* called unto him out of the midst of the bush…I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham…” (Exodus 3:2,4,6).**

But here in Acts 5, it seems like it *wasn’t* the Lord, but rather one of His many “ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:7,14).

But here we have to ask *why* God sent an angel to break the apostles out of jail. Remember, the Bible talks an awful lot about a Christian’s responsibility to obey the government. Well, if the government of Israel put the apostles in jail, why would God undermine their authority by breaking them out?

The answer is that those leaders *were no longer Israel’s governors.* Not after what the Lord told them in Matthew 21:43 when He said,

**“*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you*, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”**

And we don’t have to guess who the Lord planned to give the kingdom *to,* for He told His followers,

**“Fear not, *little flock;* for it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).**

The Lord gave the authority over the nation of Israel that He took from Israel’s religious leaders and gave it to the little flock of His followers. That means here at Pentecost, God no longer considered the Sadducees, and the high priest, and the rest of this crowd to be the legitimate rulers of Israel. And *that* means they had *no right* to arrest and incarcerate the *new* leaders of the nation Israel. And *that* means the angel wasn’t doing anything wrong when he broke the apostles out of jail.

But did you know that this midnight jailbreak was *predicted* a couple of times in the psalms? First, see if this doesn’t sound like he’s describing what’s happening here at Pentecost when he wrote,

**“For the Lord heareth the poor, *and despiseth not His prisoners”* (Psalm 69:33).**

Wasn’t the Lord helping the poor at Pentecost when He had the disciples sell all they possessed and give the proceeds to the poor (Luke 18:22 cf. Acts 2:44,45; 4:34-37)? And didn’t the Lord show He didn’t despise His prisoners here when He broke the apostles out of prison?

Here’s another psalm that talks about what was happening at Pentecost:

**“*Put not your trust in princes*…Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help…*which giveth food to the hungry*. The LORD *looseth the prisoners:* The LORD *openeth the eyes of the blind*…but the way of the wicked *He turneth upside down”* (Psalm 146:3-9).**

After warning his countrymen not to trust in “princes” like those religious leaders at Pentecost, this psalm *also* talks about how God met the needs of the poor at Pentecost by feeding them through those who sold all their possessions to help them. And when he predicted that the eyes of the blind would be opened, that too sounds like Pentecost, as does the loosing of God’s prisoners. And I’ll bet it turned the way of those wicked rulers upside down when God freed the prisoners that they incarcerated—especially when we see *how* the angel freed them, as we will in a moment.

I point this out because I’m sometimes asked what the dispensational place of the Psalms is. I always reply by saying that the Psalms will serve as sort of a *guidebook* for God’s people in Israel in the Tribulation. These apostles were heading into the Tribulation that would have come had God not interrupted His prophetic program with the dispensation of the mystery.

Now dumb Gentiles like us don’t notice connections like that in the psalms, but those Jews in the Tribulation will! Stuff like that will virtually *jump off the page* at them—you know, like it does when *you* find answers to *your* problems in the Bible!

Now does that mean *we* shouldn’t read the psalms? Of course we should read the psalms! You can be very encouraged by the psalms when you see God being faithful to His people in Israel, for that means He’ll be just as faithful to you! Just be sure to remember the dispensational place of the psalms, and don’t be expecting God to break *you* out of jail, even if you’re jailed for preaching Christ!

But now that angel didn’t break them out of jail just so they could enjoy their freedom. He gave them some *orders,* as we see when we read Acts 5:20 again,

**“Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”**

This reminds me of how you and I have been delivered out of the prison *of our sins.* That’s what the word “redeem” means! When Christ died on the cross, He paid the price *to buy you back from the slave market of sin.*

But He didn’t just free us so we could sit back and enjoy our redemption. He freed *us* with orders too, the same orders to preach to the people in *our* lives all the words of “this life,” the words of *eternal* life God gives us today through Paul.

And I think the angel told them to speak “all” the words of this life because when God’s people speak to others, they tend to leave out *some* of the words of life—the words they think people won’t want to hear.

What words do you think the Sadducees didn’t want to hear? Why, the words about the Lord’s resurrection, of course! But those were words they *needed* to hear if they wanted to get saved!

What words do you suppose men might not want to hear today? How about the words that say they aren’t good enough to go to heaven, so Christ had to die on the cross to save them? People get *offended* when you tell them that. That’s why Paul talked about “the offence of the cross” (Gal. 5:11). But it’s what people need to hear to be saved today!

There’s an old saying that says, “Before you can get ‘em saved you have to get ‘em lost” by making them realize they are sinners who *need* to be saved! So make sure *you* speak “all the words of this life” when you share the gospel with people.

But now, I think the reason the angel told them to resume their ministry *in the temple* is that that’s where the twelve were arrested for preaching Christ in the first place! So they might have been thinking, “Maybe we should try preaching someplace else, someplace less visible, out of the public eye. Some place less likely to get us arrested and thrown in jail!” But that’s not how the Lord operated when He was here, as we see when the Lord said,

**“*I spake openly to the world;* I ever taught in the synagogue, *and in the temple*, whither the Jews always resort; *and in secret have I said nothing”* (John 18:20).**

The Lord didn’t conduct His ministry away from the public eye, and He didn’t want His apostles operating that way either. That’s how we operate at *Faith Bible Church!* We put the recordings of our messages on the internet every week. We don’t have anything to hide! Only the cults conduct their ministry behind closed doors.

But now, if you or I were told to go back and continue preaching in the very place where we were arrested for preaching in the first place, we might have some second thoughts about that—but not the apostles! After the angel told them to go back to the temple to resume their ministry, they looked at each other and said, “Last one back to the temple’s a rotten egg!” Remember when we used to say that when we were kids? Well, that’s how they felt about going right back to where they were arrested to preach, as we see as we read on in our text:

**“And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought” (Acts 5:21).**

Now did you follow all that? The apostles went back and started teaching in the temple “early in the morning,” showing they just couldn’t *wait* to get back to work! A little while later, the high priest arrived at the temple and punched in to begin his workday. And either he and his entourage didn’t hear the twelve preaching in the temple, or else they figured it was someone else preaching something else, for he ordered the twelve to be brought out of prison. He also called all the big shots in Israel together to *judge* the apostles once they were brought.

Now the Bible doesn’t tell us how *many* judges the “council” and the “senate” would entail, but secular history suggests that there were *70 men* in the Sanhedrin, and two more groups of 23 men each in the council, for a grand total of 116 judges—to judge twelve men! It’s obvious that those leaders intended to make *a big splash* in judging the apostles, and send a message to the entire nation of Israel that they weren’t going to tolerate any more preaching of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now I personally think that the Bible mentions Israel’s “senate” here because there’s only one other place in the Bible that refers to a senate. We see it in Psalm 105, where it said that Joseph was in prison and,

**“*The king sent and loosed him;* even the ruler of the people, *and let him go free.* He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; *and teach his senators wisdom”* (Psalm 105:20-22).**

Of coure, the “senators” here were not part of the senate that we’re reading about in Israel in our text. They were part of *Pharaoh’s* senate in ancient Egypt. But they must have needed wisdom as much as Israel’s senators did! And when Joseph was able to miraculously interpret the king’s dream, he saw Joseph’s wisdom *and released him from prison,* and made him ruler over his senators.

So maybe—just maybe—God used this word “senate” here in Acts 5 to suggest that Israel’s “king,” her high priest, and his senators should have looked at the miracles that *the apostles* were doing and let them out of jail, and make them the new rulers over *their* senate, just as Pharaoh had done. *Especially* since it was an unsaved *Gentile* king who had enough sense to do that back in Joseph’s day!

Hey, it wouldn’t be the first time God shamed the Jews by comparing them to the Gentiles, as we see when the Lord told the Jews in the synagogue in His home town,

**“I tell you of a truth, *many widows were in Israel* in the days of Elias…when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of *them* was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. *And many lepers were in Israel* in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of *them* was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, *were filled with wrath,* And rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, *that they might cast Him down headlong*. But He passing through the midst of them went His way” (Luke 4:25-30).**

It *infuriated* those Jews when the Lord shamed them by pointing out how God had ignored widows in Israel and ministered to a Gentile woman in Sarepta, and how He ignored the lepers in Israel and cleansed a leper from Syria—all because they demonstrated the kind of faith that the Lord found was *absent* from Israel in His day (Mt. 8:10; 15:28; Lu. 5:20; 7:50). And maybe, just maybe, when the Jews at Pentecost saw their senate convened, they might have thought about Pharaoh’s senate and how *his* senators did what Israel’s senators *should* have done!

But as we read on, we see what happened when the soldiers went to fetch the apostles out of prison:

**“But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned and told,**

**“Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within” (Acts 5:22,23).**

Now it sounds like they were reporting that the keepers of the jail were standing faithfully at their posts, but claimed they hadn’t seen the twelve escape. Compare that to what we read earlier about their escape:

**“…the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth…” (Acts 5:19).**

Here it says the angel opened the doors of the prison. How’d he do that without the keepers of the prison noticing? Well, compare this to what happened later in the Book of Acts when an angel broke Peter out of jail:

**“Peter therefore was kept in prison…the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: *and the keepers before the door kept the prison…*And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him…And his chains fell off from his hands…And he saith unto him…follow me. And he went out, and followed him…*When they were past the first and the second ward*, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed” (Acts 12:5-10).**

We know that the “wards” mentioned there were *guards,* for Jeremiah 37:13 mentions “a captain of the ward,” and captains were leaders of *soldiers.* That means Peter and the angel just *walked right past the guards* as they left the prison, without them noticing. And that sounds like what must have happened to the apostles here as well. Boy, talk about turning the way of those leaders upside down, as the psalmist predicted! I know it would certainly turn *my* world upside down if something like that happened to men that I incarcerated!

But that means those leaders must have known that *another* miracle had just taken place! So you’d think they’d finally cave in and believe the message that the twelve were preaching about the resurrected Christ! But as we read on, we see that this was sadly not the case:

**“Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow” (Acts 5:24).**

Now notice it doesn’t say they doubted if it was true or not that the twelve had been miraculously delivered from prison. I think they knew the story was true, for they knew the story of their miracles was true! Remember what they said after Peter and John healed the lame man?

They admitted that

**“…a notable miracle hath been done by them…*and we cannot deny it”* (Acts 4:16).**

So when the apostles miraculously escaped from jail, it never entered their minds to doubt that *another* miracle had taken place. The only thing they doubted was “whereunto this would grow.” That means they worried that people might start saying that a miracle had taken place, the kind that often happened to Elijah. Remember when Elijah told Obadiah to go tell King Ahab he was there to see him, and Obadiah said, “Nothing doing!” as it were, adding,

**“…as soon as I am gone from thee…*the spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not;* and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me” (I Kings 18:12),**

You can tell from Obadiah’s protest here that this kind of thing must have happened to Elijah all the time! And these leaders were worried that that’s what people would make of this too, that the Spirit of God had whisked the apostles out of prison in a similar manner.

But as they well knew, something miraculous *had* happened, it didn’t *need* to grow out of proportion in Israel!

Now let’s listen in as someone breaks the news to these leaders that the twelve were not only not in jail where they left them, they were preaching in the temple!

**“Then came one and told them, saying, 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” (Acts 5:25,26).**

Now notice who they *didn’t* fear. They didn’t fear the God who’d opened the prison doors!

**“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,**

**“Saying, Did not we 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” (Acts 5:27,28).**

Now here I need to point out that what the high priest was saying *wasn’t true.* The apostles *hadn’t* “filled” Jerusalem with their doctrine. Oh, sure, 3,000 men got saved the first day of Pentecost, and 5,000 more were saved the next day. But secular history tells us that 600,000 people lived in Jerusalem at that time. That means that even adding in the families of those men, it can hardly be said that Jerusalem was “filled” with the doctrine of the apostles. If it had been, the twelve would have *left* Jerusalem and carried the gospel to other cities, as the Lord had instructed them to do in the Great Commission (Acts 1:8).

But if they really hadn’t filled the city with their doctrine, why did the high priest say that they had? Well, he was trying to make the threat posed by their doctrine seem worse than it actually was. This is reminiscent of what the Pharisees said after the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead, and even more people started following the Lord:

**“the Pharisees therefore said among themselves…behold, *the world is gone after Him”* (John 12:19).**

Now you know that’s not true. The world hadn’t gone after the Lord! But when you say things like that, it makes it easier to get people all worked up, and get them to overreact to things. And that’s what the high priest was trying to do here.

Now when the High priest said they were trying to bring the Lord’s blood on them, that was certainly a different tune than they were singing just 50 days earlier when Pilate was rying to get them not to crucify the Lord. At that time, we read that

**“When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying*, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it*. Then answered all the people, and said, *His blood be on us, and on our children”* (Matthew 27:24,25).**

They said, as it were, “You can not only hold *us* responsible for His blood, ou can hold our *kids* responsible for it!” Do you know how *crazy mad* you have to be to say something like that? But that’s how crazy mad they were! They were *indignant.* But even Judas had enough sense to say what he said after he betrayed the Lord:

**“Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood”* (Matthew 27:3,4).**

Now that doesn’t mean that he got saved, of course. If you check the context, you’ll see that rather than bring forth fruits meet for repentance, Judas went out and hung himself instead. His “repentance” was just “the sorrow of the world” that “worketh death” (II Cor. 7:10). But at least he was smart enough to admit what he’d done to the innocent blood of the Lord, unlike these leaders at Pentecost!

But there was something else that the high priest was wrong about. The apostles *weren’t* trying to bring the Lord’s blood on him and his company! Oh, it’s true that Peter started out by charging Israel with the death of Christ. But then he told them,

**“And now, brethren, *I wot that through ignorance ye did it,* as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:17).**

As we saw when we studied that passage, after charging Israel with the blood of Christ, Peter reduced the charge against them from murder to manslaughter. And their option to accept that plea bargain was still on the table here in Acts 5. God was *not* trying to bring the Lord’s blood upon them!

And He’s still not today. If you’re not saved, you need to know that God isn’t trying to bring the Lord’s blood on you either—even if you are Jewish! I know that *Christians* often blame the Jews for crucifying the Lord, but God isn’t! If you are Jewish, God isn’t saying to you, “You did it!” He’s saying, “*I* did it. I did it for you!”

And if you’ll just believe that, God will save your soul.