

Acts 5:17-21a

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The Sadducees are angered by the apostles' ministry in the temple and have them arrested. An angel frees the apostles during the night and tells them to return to the temple and continue teaching. The apostles obey.

For some time, the apostles have been healing and teaching in Solomon's porch, which led into the inner court of the temple. People were coming even from the suburbs of Jerusalem, being healed and believing in Jesus. But since it was done right outside the temple, this location for ministry was bound to be short-lived.

But the high priest Annas rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. The high priest viewed the temple grounds as his own dominion. It was where money changers and animal merchants set up shop, creating an industry to overcharge people who had come to worship, where Jesus had twice overturned tables and rebuked the unholy practice (Matthew 21:12-13, John 2:14-15).

The *high priest* and the Sanhedrin (the council of 70 Pharisees and Sadducees) had already warned Peter and John to be quiet (Acts 4:18). As the apostles told them they would do, they continued to follow God rather than man (Acts 4:19). So *They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.* Thus the Sadducees make good on their threat that the apostles better not preach anymore (Acts 4:18,21).

The religious sect of the Sadducees was made up of temple priests, predominantly in Jerusalem because that was the location of the Temple. They administered the sacrifices. Anything that took place on the Temple Mount was in the Sadducees' domain, or what they perceived to be their domain. In the Gospels and in the book of Acts, the Sadducees often sided with the Pharisees to oppose Jesus and the apostles, although it seems they were otherwise rivals. They viewed Jesus as a common enemy, but the Sadducees were quite different from the Pharisees in many respects. The Pharisees taught in local synagogues throughout all of Judea as teachers of the Law, whereas the Sadducees operated within the temple.

So, seeing that the apostles are gaining a large following within the temple's entrance, amassing large crowds and performing healings, telling everyone that Jesus is the Messiah, and refusing to abide by their cease-and-desist order, the Sadducees have the apostles arrested by the temple police and put into a common prison. This is not a Roman jail cell, but one overseen by the Jewish leadership.

Their prison sentence is miraculously brief. In a matter-of-fact way, Luke, the author of the book of Acts, writes *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison.* God immediately sets the apostles free that very night. He does it so that the work of preaching the gospel can continue uninterrupted. The angel, when *taking them out* of the cell, commands them, *Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.*

Setting the apostles free also gives a clear sign to those who had them arrested, that the disciples were acting on behalf of God. The Sadducees and Pharisees, if they truly were seeking God, would see how everything they did was corrected by God. They crucified His Messiah, and the Messiah was resurrected. They arrest the apostles, the apostles are set free right away.

The apostles were to teach the *whole message of this Life*. God purposed for His people to gain the fullness of life. God always has the best interest of His people at heart. He is performing miracles through the apostles that Israel might hear the words of *Life*, and gain the immense benefit of hearing and living *the whole message of this Life*.

Receiving their orders directly from God via an *angel of the Lord*, the apostles obey: *Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach*. Right as the sun was rising, they were back where they had been the day before. In the temple, teaching the *whole message of this Life*, as the angel phrased it. The *whole message of this Life* is unique to this verse. It does not appear elsewhere in scripture. But it describes the good news of Jesus. It is a complete *message*, *whole* in its point and purpose, involving the *Life* which God calls all people to lead.

The disciples were teaching the people that God's Messiah had really come to earth, had died, and was resurrected, and that repentance from sin and faith in this Messiah would reconcile them to God fully, allowing them to live *this Life* as their creator had originally designed it to be lived. Eternal life is a gift, received through faith (John 3:14-16). It is also a benefit/consequence/reward for living according to the words of *Life*, in obedience to God, through the resurrection power of Jesus. Both the new birth as well as the abundant life constitute the *whole message of this Life*.

And they taught this in the *temple*, which was the most appropriate place to teach such a *message*. What was meant to be the house of God and a place to worship God, God was now speaking to His people in its courtyard through His messengers, the apostles. The purpose of the temple was to point people to God. Now God was performing miracles in His house (John 2:16). The Sadducees thought the temple belonged to them, that it was their dominion, that they controlled what happened there, what was taught. But the temple did not belong to the Sadducees, it belonged to God, and God was now revealing to His people *the whole message of this Life* through the agency of His servants.

Biblical Text

17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy. 18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 "Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." 21 Upon hearing this, they entered into the temple about daybreak and began to teach.