

Acts 5:21b-26

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The Council of Pharisees and Sadducees send for their prisoners, the apostles. But the temple soldiers discover the apostles are not in the jail, despite the doors being locked and the guards standing at their posts. A messenger informs the Council that the apostles are back at the temple, teaching just as before. The guards arrest the apostles again, peacefully, to avoid conflict with the crowds of people there.

The apostles have been freed from jail by an angel, and were commanded to return to the temple and continue preaching about Jesus's resurrection. What follows is a comedy of errors as the *temple guard* and the *chief priests* try to solve the mystery of the missing prisoners.

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, which was the Sanhedrin, composed of 70 Sadducees and Pharisees, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. All were gathered to examine the apostles' misdeeds and render a punishment of some kind, just as in Acts 4:5 when they held trial over John and Peter. Luke notes that even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, meaning the full court of elders who governed Israel (under Roman rule, of course) were present for this trial. Thus the Council assembled together, waiting for the prisoners to be brought from the prison house, where the apostles had been placed the night before.

But of course the officers who came to the jail did not find them in the prison, because they were not there. An angel had set them free during the night and told them to go preach about Jesus in the temple, which they were currently doing (Acts 5:19-21). The officers and temple guards returned and reported back to the Council: "We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside."

Everything was as it should be. The *prison house* is *locked quite securely*, meaning the locks have not been broken, nothing has been forced open. Furthermore the *guards* are *standing at the doors*, still at their posts, making sure the prisoners remain in their cell. But when the *officers* *opened up* the cell, they *found no one inside*. The apostles simply weren't there. There was no evidence of an escape, nor apparently had the *guards* seen the angel or the apostles exiting their imprisonment. They must have walked past the *guards* completely hidden by God's power, or been miraculously transported through the prison walls.

Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this.

The Sadducees and these officers are stunned. They are also probably a bit embarrassed, "We just told the Pharisees to come here to condemn these men, but we don't have anybody to condemn. They're not here; what's going on?" The phrase "they were greatly perplexed" is translated from one Greek word "diaporeó" which means "perplexed, thoroughly nonplussed, full of doubt." It is almost like saying they were in denial, "This can't be." Of course this fits

perfectly with their past unwillingness to acknowledge the reality of the miracles being performed. They are completely blinded to any possibility that they are wrong, and God is moving in their midst.

While they never will know how the apostles escaped, they learn of their whereabouts right away. *But someone*, a guard or a servant or priest, *came and reported to them*, “*The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!*”

The apostles were doing as the angel who freed them had commanded them to do—speaking to the people in the *temple* about the whole message of this Life (Acts 5:20). They had not fled, they had not gone to their homes to hide, or left the city and returned to Galilee. The apostles went right back to *the temple*, right back to the “scene of the crime,” to teach about the resurrection of Jesus, to call the Jews to repent and return to God, to become repeat offenders. They were obeying God, not man (Acts 4:19-20). They were acting with complete boldness. This boldness was given to them by the Holy Spirit in answer to their prayers (Acts 4:23-31).

Upon learning where their prisoners escaped to, the *chief priests* naturally send out their soldiers to arrest them again: *Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back*. However, the *captain* and his *officers* are careful to arrest the apostles *without violence*, meaning they did not seize them, beat them, berate them. The apostles clearly were not fishing for a fight either, since they were preaching the gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15, Matthew 26:52), and probably expected to be arrested again.

But interestingly, the *captain* and the *officers* arrested them *without violence* because *they were afraid of the people* of Israel, *that they might be stoned*. From the perspective of the crowds gathered there, the apostles were sent by God, were healing their sick and demon-possessed, were preaching a gospel of reconciliation and resurrection that many of them believed in (Acts 5:14-16). These were good men doing good things, showing and telling of God’s glory. So the guards knew that mishandling them could possibly trigger a riot, and the crowds might try to rescue the apostles and stone their oppressors. There were clearly many people gathered there in a fairly tight space in the walkway of Solomon’s columns. But the apostles went willingly with the soldiers, and no *violence* occurred.

Biblical Text

Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought. 22 But the officers who came did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported back, 23 saying, “We found the prison house locked quite securely and the guards standing at the doors; but when we had opened up, we found no one inside.” 24 Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them as to what would come of this. 25 But someone came and reported to them, “The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” 26 Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence (for they were afraid of the people, that they might be stoned).