

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

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Text

Acts 5:17-26

Topic

An angel sets the twelve apostles free from the common prison and tells them to return to the mission Jesus has given them of proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world

Title

Angels in the Mission Field

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

Acts 5:18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

Acts 5:19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,

Acts 5:20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

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

Acts 5:22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,

Acts 5:23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

Acts 5:24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

Acts 5:25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

Acts 5:26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.

Introduction

Think of your favorite vacation spot. As you are resting or recreating there, have you ever said to yourself or those with you, *Ah, this is the life!*

Now think of the apostles of Jesus Christ. They are the itinerant preachers of a message that has brought them into conflict with the religious authorities. Two of them had been previously detained; now all of them had been imprisoned. They were set free but told to go right on with the activity that would insure their continuing persecution. Yet with real enthusiasm they proclaimed to everyone who would listen, ***This is the life!***

The word for **life** appears for the first time in the Book of Acts. Of course, they were talking about Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. The word is used about thirty-six times in the New Testament, often as a synonym for the Lord Himself.

But it is also a description of your daily experience with Jesus. In John 10:10 the Lord said, **I have come that [you] might have life, and that [you] may have it more abundantly.**

Every blessing and every buffeting is a platform from which you can stand and proclaim, *This is the life!*

I'll organize my thoughts about these verses around two points: #1 Submit To God And Experience His Life , and #2 Covet The World And You Will Miss His Life.

#1 Submit To God
And You Will Experience His Life
(v17-21a)

Look at your own life and its circumstances:

1. Some of us seem to be going through testings and trials. We might almost think of them as a prison because we see no way out. We are nevertheless called upon to proclaim, *This is the life!*
2. Some of you have it made in the shade! But wait a minute: When you proclaim, *This is the life!* are you talking about your relationship with Jesus, or are you settling in to the comforts and conveniences you have been blessed to enjoy?

The Christian life **is** the life whether you are blessed or buffeted, abounding or being abased. The twelve apostles knew it. You can know it too.

A key to the attitude of the twelve was their submission to God and His authority. Later in this chapter Peter, speaking for them all, will say, **We ought to obey God rather than men** (v29). Submitting to God's authority put them or kept them right where God wanted them. God then filled them with His Spirit to experience His life in their real life circumstances.

Let's note certain qualities of their submission to God.

First of all, the apostles were actively submitting to God. They were busy serving Him. They weren't getting more training; or putting their affairs in order; or waiting until their careers were over.

God has called upon each of us to serve Him **now**, right where we are. Your current marriage, job, or Church is where God wants you to experience His life.

The apostles were daily in the Temple preaching to large crowds. The Church numbered perhaps more than ten thousand men and women. Besides the numerical growth there were many signs, wonders, and miracles being performed through these men.

God was drawing a line in the sand. Either you believed in Jesus and were added to the Church or you remained in your unbelief. The religious leaders sadly chose to remain steadfast in their unbelief.

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

The nation of Israel was subject to Rome but had limited local authority to handle their own affairs. The Jews were led by what was called the Sanhedrin. It was a ruling body of seventy men plus the high priest.

The Sanhedrin was dominated by a party known as the **Sadducees**. They were wealthy Jews who worked at keeping the status quo. Life under Roman rule wasn't so bad for them.

The apostles were going around performing miracles. Their message was contrary to the traditional Jewish teachings. They were drawing huge, enthusiastic crowds and had thousands of followers. Of course it caused **indignation** among the Sadducees of the Sanhedrin. They ratcheted-up their opposition.

Acts 5:18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

Living and proclaiming the life of Christ landed them in the public jail. *Not my idea of the ideal life!*

The apostles were living to be pleasing God. It landed them in prison, but it set them free to serve the Lord. It teaches you that a believer submitted to God does not gauge life by their circumstances.

Acts 5:19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said,

The existence and ministry of angels is abundantly taught in God's Word. They are created beings in a classification all their own. At one time a third of them followed Lucifer, himself an angel, in his rebellion against God. They fell. Lucifer became Satan and the angels who sided with him are the demons. But two-thirds remained obedient and now serve God's providential purposes.

One of them is dispatched to free the apostles from prison. He had a message for them,

Acts 5:20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

They were set free to go on doing exactly what got them imprisoned. *Of course they were!* What else could they do?

We need that resolve in our daily lives. When life at home, or at work, or even in the Church, seems to be going against us we should go on living it right where we are at in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Your circumstances or the other person don't need to change in order for you to experience God's abundant life.

Submitting to God means we recognize He is at work in all our circumstances. I love the line in one of the choruses we sing that goes, *You are God in what seems like happenstance; You are God in every circumstance.* It is a promise to submit and continue to experience the life of Christ whether I am abounding or being abased.

Acts 5:21 And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught... [stop there]

We're not sure just when they were released. As early as possible they were back on the job. They didn't take a short sabbatical. They didn't go on a retreat to recharge their spiritual batteries. They didn't go in for counseling. They immediately and zealously obeyed God.

Immediate and zealous obedience is the mark of submitting to God. Otherwise we are all talk and no walk.

The apostles experienced the **life** in ways we long after. Their simple secret was to submit to God. They were actively submitted. They immediately and zealously obeyed God. They did not live 'under their circumstances' but rather viewed their circumstances as part of God's plan for them. They kept right on doing the things God had told them to.

We will experience the life to the extent we have this same quality in our submission to God. A Christian submitted to God has a joy that cannot be quenched by being abased or in his abounding. He rises above the material and the physical and lives in the spiritual.

Such a Christian will always be a target of the enemy. The religious leaders had a bull's-eye on the apostles... But would miss their mark and look silly in the process.

#2 Covet The World
And You Will Miss His Life
(v21b-26)

Take another look at the Sanhedrin. In many ways they represented the cream of Jewish culture. They were living the lifestyles of the rich and famous. People respected them. Those who did not respect them envied them, which gave them even greater satisfaction. They were abounding and thought they had need of nothing. They were comfortable.

But they were also covetous. Here was a genuine movement of God. The Lord was giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the mute. Cripples and paralytics were leaping and jumping and praising God for it. Demons were being confronted and cast out freeing their human host to be healed and made whole. Yet the Sanhedrin opposed it because they coveted the world and its comforts.

They denied the supernatural, even though it was right in front of them. They were willing to deny God rather than be denied their worldly comforts. They coveted the world and missed the life God was offering them.

In passing let me give us something to consider. Since we are so materially blessed in America, could it be clouding our minds as to the supernatural? Have we become so material that we do not see a need for the miraculous on a daily basis?

We pick-up the story in the middle of verse twenty-one.

[Acts 5:21](#) ... But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

All the Sanhedrin was convened. It was rare that they all got together. Their full attendance was intended to intimidate the apostles with the authority and power of this group.

Have you ever gone into a meeting like that – where you are being intimidated by superiors? If so, you can relate. If not, go and watch the movie, *Chariots of Fire*. There's a scene where a group of powerful men has convened to try to intimidate Eric Liddle into abandoning his religious conviction to not run on the Sabbath. He stands firm in his submission to God.

This austere, august group of privileged men had gathered to throw their weight around in order to maintain their power and authority. They would have timed and scripted all of the movements of this event. They would have taken their seats, put on their game faces, then called for the prisoners

Acts 5:22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported,

Acts 5:23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!"

This was comical! In one fleeting moment God broke their authority and power. He would allow them to persecute, hurt, and even martyr His beloved believers. But they had no real power over them.

We must understand again that the worst the world can do is kill us. Yet it matters not because we will be absent from our bodies and present with our Lord.

Acts 5:24 Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.

They could not foresee the outcome because they could not control the situation. They were dealing with forces and power beyond anything they had ever confronted. God was in control.

He always is! We forget His sovereignty and providence to our spiritual detriment.

Acts 5:25 So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"

It would have been better for the Sanhedrin if the apostles had fled. At least then they would be able to brand them criminals. By returning to the same place and to the same preaching that had landed them in jail they were establishing beyond the shadow of a doubt that God was in charge, not the Sanhedrin.

Acts 5:26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.

The apostles did not resist. They were not advocating some sort of revolution against authority. They were demonstrating a return to God's authority.

Covetousness eats away at your submission to God. The desire for the comforts and benefits of this world will always interfere with submission. It is an especially big problem in America where we are all so blessed materially. If we are not constantly on our guard we risk becoming like the Sadducees. It happens slowly, over time, so that we don't see how far we are from ever saying, *Here I am, Lord, send me!*

Applying God's Word

If you are a believer you can reflect upon this question: Am I submitted to God in my circumstances? **It's a big question!** It needs to be answered both by those who are being abased and by those who are abounding.

Perhaps you are a nonbeliever. The best that the world has to offer you is a temporary comfort – and you probably won't ever achieve it to a level that will cause you to quit coveting more.

Real life is spiritual, not material. God has made you with eternity in your heart. You can never be satisfied until you know Him. You can only know God through Jesus Christ.

