

This passage demonstrates again the futility of opposing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Sadducee members of the Sanhedrin arrest and imprison the apostles to prevent them from preaching Jesus Christ but God releases them and sends them back to the temple so that they can continue to preach and teach. Man cannot shut a door that God wants open.

**Verses 1-11:** Following the example of people such as Barnabas (Acts 4:35-37) who sold land in order to raise money for the needs of their fellow believers, a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira also sold a plot of land and brought the proceeds to the apostles to be distributed as needed. However, they portrayed the amount they brought as if it were the full amount, keeping back part of the money for themselves. Their sin was not that they kept back part of the money for themselves, for Peter stated that the land and the money both belonged to Ananias and Sapphira to do with as they pleased. The sin lay in the fact that they had lied to the Holy Spirit and that sin cost both of them their lives.

**Verses 12-16:** The church grew as the apostles healed the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits. The apostles were getting a lot of attention from the area surrounding Jerusalem as multitudes brought the sick to be healed. However, this activity also attracted the disapproving attention of the Sanhedrin.

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17 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, 18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

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**“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,)”** – The high priest was a Sadducee, as was most of the Sanhedrin council. Sadducees rejected all things supernatural, which included the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which the apostles were preaching and teaching, as well as the healing of the sick. These Sadducee members of the Sanhedrin “rose up” (they were moved to action) because of what the apostles were doing.

**“and were filled with indignation [zeal; envy; jealousy]”** – The apostles were teaching the people, which was a function of the Sanhedrin as the leaders of the Jews. Also, the apostles were teaching the resurrection of Jesus Christ, something that these Sadducees rejected out of hand. The people were beginning to follow this teaching rather than that of the Sanhedrin, provoking the jealousy of these Jewish rulers. Thus, the Sanhedrin wanted to put a stop to the apostles.

**“And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison”** – The “common” prison was the public jail. They were treated like common criminals, perhaps to disgrace them before the people.

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19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

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**“But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth”** – The Sadducees wanted to restrain the apostles from teaching and preaching the gospel to the people but God had other plans. The Sadducees wanted to interrogate apostles the next day but God sent an angel to release them that night.

**“and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people”** – The message that God had given the apostles to preach was of the utmost importance and the angel encourages them to go to the temple and preach it. The Sanhedrin was attempting to close the door on the gospel but God was keeping it open.

**“all the words of this life”** – The apostles are to speak “all the words” – everything that Jesus had taught them. They were not to withhold anything because those words have eternal significance. They are also to speak the “words of this life.” The apostles had information that would have an impact on people’s lives and can lead them to eternal life. It was more than life-or-death – the gospel has eternal consequences.

**Verses 21-24:** The apostles obeyed the angel and returned to the temple early the next morning and resumed teaching the people. Meanwhile the Sanhedrin began their session and called for the officers to bring the apostles out of the prison so that they could be questioned. However, when the officers returned, they reported that even though the prison was locked and the guards were at their posts, the prisoners were not there. The Sanhedrin was understandably perplexed about what had happened.

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25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

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**“Then came one and told them”** – This was likely not a member of the Sanhedrin but an affiliate that was aware that the Sanhedrin had arrested the apostles for teaching the people.

**“saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people”** – The Sanhedrin was the governing body over the Jews. They expected that when they put someone in prison, that person would remain there until they decided to release them. However, that was not the case here. They imprisoned the apostles in order to prevent them from teaching but, not only were the apostles no longer in prison, they were back in the temple doing the very thing that caused the Sanhedrin to arrest them. This turn of affairs was no doubt embarrassing as well as surprising to the members of the Sanhedrin. They might have expected the apostles to have fled the city or to go into hiding. Instead the apostles were once again publicly teaching the things that had gotten them in trouble before.

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

**“Then went the captain with the officers”** – These were the police force of the temple. They kept order in the temple as well as enforcing the will of the Sanhedrin. They were sent to retrieve the apostles from the temple and bring them before the Sanhedrin court.

**“and brought them without violence [strength; force]”** – The captain and officers did not take the apostles by force. Apparently they spoke to the apostles without using stern speech in order to give the appearance of being “friendly.”

**“for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned”** – The captain and the officers had been ordered to bring the apostles but self-preservation caused them to approach this task carefully. Like Jesus, the apostles had gained the favor of the people because of the healings and other miracles that they had performed, as well as teaching them the way of eternal life. The people would likely have protested violently had the captain and officers of the temple demonstrated opposition to what the apostles were doing by taking them away in a forceful manner.

27 And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28 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.

**“And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council”** – Once the captain and officers had returned with the apostles, they bring them before the council in order to be questioned.

**“and the high priest asked them”** – As the leader of the Sanhedrin, the high priest began the questioning.

**“Saying, Did not we straitly [paraggelia: to charge; command] command [paraggello: to charge; command] you”** – The high priest was referring to the last time the apostles had appeared before their council: Acts 4:18. The Greek word translated “straitly” is derived from the Greek word translated “command” and has the same meaning. Using the two words together like this was a linguistic device to intensify the meaning, just as was used in Acts 4:17 (“straitly threaten”). It would be like saying “Did we not *commandingly* command you?” It had not been a suggestion or a preference that they had given the apostles. Their intent was for the apostles to immediately and permanently cease and desist preaching and teaching.

**“that ye should not teach in this name?”** – The high priest’s hatred of Jesus is apparent since does not bother to say the name of Jesus. Instead, he refers to the name of Jesus as “this name.”

**“and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine”** – This statement indicates how far the gospel had spread in Jerusalem. The apostles had obeyed Jesus’ command to be witnesses for Him (Acts 1:8) and the Holy Spirit had amplified the effectiveness of their witness to the extent that all of Jerusalem had heard the gospel. The apostles had been teaching at the temple, a place where virtually all Jews regularly visited, enabling the bulk of the city to hear the gospel.

**“and intend to bring this man's blood upon us”** – The apostles had not sugar coated the fact that Jesus had been crucified under the authority of these Jewish rulers. These rulers would like to have made Jesus responsible for His own death since they had condemned Him as a blasphemer (Matt. 26:65-66), but the apostles have been plainly teaching that the Jews had crucified their Messiah, the Holy One of God (Acts 1:36; 3:14-15). The members of the Sanhedrin did not like the idea that the public would perceive them as having condemned an innocent man to death, particularly if that man was considered to be the Messiah.

29 Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

**“Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered”** – Peter was clearly the leader of the apostles and spoke for them.

**“and said, We ought to obey God rather than men”** – Peter reiterates the non-negotiable principal that he had stated the last time they had stood before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:19 “*But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye*”). The last time was basically a rhetorical question and now he answers that question in no uncertain terms. Obedience to the Sanhedrin’s command to stop preaching in the name of Jesus Christ would mean that they would have to disobey God. Thus obeying God took precedence over obeying the commands of “men” (the Sanhedrin).

**Verses 30-42:** Peter and the other apostles continue their defense, stating that God had sent Jesus but the Jewish rulers had slain Him on the cross. However, God has exalted Jesus to be the Messiah and Savior of Israel and they (the apostles) were witnesses of these things that God has done. The members of the Sanhedrin became infuriated and began making plans to kill the apostles. Then a well respected rabbi, Gamaliel, had the apostles taken out of the chamber and then cautioned the council on what they did next. He stated that if the teaching of the apostles was of men, then it would eventually fizzle out and amount to nothing. However, if it be of God, then they would be powerless to stop it because then they would be fighting against God Himself. This statement convinced the council and the apostles were beaten and then released. Even after being beaten, the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus Christ. This experience did not dampen the apostles’ zeal for the gospel because they returned to daily preaching Jesus Christ in the temple and in people’s houses.