

Bible Stories for Adults

Apostles in Prison

Acts 4-5

Opening

Gathering: What ways are Christians stopped from witnessing today?

Today's Focus: Peter and John continued to witness boldly despite being arrested, beaten and told to stop.

Key Verses: *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12*

*Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."
Acts 4:19-20*

Opening Prayer

Lesson

The Beginning of the Church (Acts 2)

How many of Jesus' disciples were true believers together in Jerusalem after He ascended?

Acts 1:15 = About 120

What happened 10 days after Jesus ascended that empowered and initiated the growth of this group?

Acts 2:1, 4 = The Holy Spirit filled all of these believers on the day of Pentecost

How did this event significantly impact the spread of Jesus' gospel? = Visitors took gospel home

Acts 2:5-6, 14, 37, 41 = Jews from all over the world heard the gospel, 3000 believed

How did the infant church operate?

Acts 2:42 = Teaching (study), fellowship, communion (sacraments), prayer (worship)

Where did the infant church meet? Did they quickly form a building committee?

Acts 2:46 = Met in the temple (stayed in Jerusalem) and in homes

The Evil Deed (Acts 3)

What horrible thing did two leaders of this faith do in last week's story?

Acts 3:1-3, 6-7 = They healed a man who had been crippled since birth - in Jesus' name

How do we know this wasn't a plant or an act? = Since it wasn't a festival, the people were locals

Acts 3:9-10 = Everyone recognized this man as one who had begged at the gate for years

How did Peter respond to the sudden attention for his miraculous power?

Acts 3:12, 16 = He gave the glory to Jesus and presented the gospel to the people

Stopping the Evil (Acts 4:1-4)

Besides the local worshippers, who else came to check out the commotion?

Acts 4:1 = The priests and the temple guard (*sagan* - High priest's right hand man)

Why did Luke identify that some of the priests who came were of the ruling Sadducee religious party?

Acts 4:2 = Sadducees were upset about unauthorized teaching & teaching of the resurrection

What had Peter said about resurrection? = Sadducees didn't believe in heaven, angels, resurrection

Acts 3:15, 21, 26 = Jesus had been raised from the dead and waits in heaven with God

What did the Jewish leaders decide to do to stop this evil in the temple?

Acts 4:3 = They weren't sure, so they threw Peter and John in jail overnight

Had they stopped this evil act in time?

Acts 4:4 = No, many more became believers in Jesus - Up to another 2000

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The Court is Gathered (Acts 4:5-6)

Who gathered to determine how to respond to these trouble-makers?

Acts 4:5-6 = The Jewish leaders - The Sanhedrin (4:15)

What other meeting of this group had taken place just a few weeks earlier?

Matthew 26:57, 59 = They gathered to find a way to get rid of a trouble-maker named Jesus

How did the previous meeting turn out?

Matthew 26:62-66 = They found him guilty of blasphemy and worthy of death

Did they see any connection between the earlier trouble-maker and these new ones?

Acts 4:13 = Yes, they recognized that Peter and John had been followers of Jesus

The Charge (Acts 4:7)

What did the Sanhedrin understand to be the purpose of this gathering?

Acts 4:7 = To determine the source of power behind this miracle

Why did the Sanhedrin feel this was the important question? = Satan can do miracles also

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 = God had commanded them to test the source of miracles and teachings

What were they to do with those who were found to be trying to lead people away from God?

Deuteronomy 13:5 = Punishment for blasphemy was death - Purge the evil

The Defense (Acts 4:8-12)

Did Peter and John have any warning that they would be treated like this for being Jesus' witnesses?

Luke 21:12 = Jesus had warned them that they would be persecuted for His sake

Why would God allow this to happen to the ones who would bring His message of salvation?

Luke 21:13 = It would result in the message being spread further and more effectively

Knowing this could happen, should Christians prepare answers to defend themselves?

Luke 21:14-15 = No, Jesus will give us the words through His Spirit

Did Peter and John remember this and respond with the Spirit's words as Jesus had instructed?

Acts 4:8-10 = Yes, He spoke boldly in the Spirit; Didn't hold anything back - even resurrection

Was Peter careful not to offend this group who could imprison him or even have him executed?

Acts 4:11 = No, He said Psalm 118:22 foretold of their rejection of the Messiah

Was Peter trying to accuse these men of murder, or did he remember the purpose of his persecution?

Acts 4:12 = He witnessed to them and offered salvation through Jesus

Note: Greek word for "saved" is same word used in v.9 for "healed"

The Verdict (Acts 4:13-22)

How did the Sanhedrin respond to these defiant words by these associates of the blasphemer Jesus?

Acts 4:13-14 = They were taken aback and unsure how to respond to their courage

What did they decide to do with Peter and John?

Acts 4:15-18 = Afraid to upset the public by punishing them, told them to be quiet

Did Peter and John thank them for the "probation" and leave quickly before they changed their mind?

Acts 4:19-20 = No, they said they'd be unable to be quiet about what God did through Jesus

Did this cause the Sanhedrin to change their mind and take stronger action?

Acts 4:21-22 = No, they were more concerned with pleasing the people than obeying God

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The Believers Respond (Acts 4:23-31)

How did the other believers respond when Peter and John told them what had happened?

Acts 4:23-24a = They prayed to God

Did they thank God for protecting Peter and John and ask for help to witness without getting caught?

Acts 4:24-30 = No, they asked for even greater boldness in speaking His word

How did God respond to this prayer?

Acts 4:31 = He filled them all with the Holy Spirit and gave them great boldness

Philip Brooks: *Do not pray for easier lives. Pray to be stronger men and women.*

Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.

Powers in Actions (Acts 5:12-16)

Did God continue to provide His power to the believers and did they remain open in their ministry?

Acts 4:33; 5:12 = Yes, Spirit's powers were evident and they witnessed openly in the temple

Did the trouble with the Sanhedrin and the power of God scare off any people?

Acts 5:13 = Yes - the believers were highly respected for doing God's ministry

Were all scared away so that the church stopped growing?

Acts 5:14 = No, many were not afraid, heard the gospel and became believers

Was this work only seen and known by the locals in Jerusalem? = Jerusalem to Judea (Acts 1:8)

Acts 5:15-16 = No, word spread and people came from all over to be healed by God's power

Arrested Again and Again (Acts 5:17-26)

How did the Sadducees feel about these trouble-makers preaching Jesus' resurrection in the temple?

Acts 5:17-18 = They had all they could take and arrested the apostles again

How did God intervene in a way that further challenged the beliefs of the Sadducees?

Acts 5:19 = He sent an angel who released the apostles at night

Were the apostles to leave town or to stay in hiding since they would be fugitives?

Acts 5:20-21a = No, they were to continue to preach boldly in the temple - They did

Did the Sanhedrin find out about the escape soon after it occurred? = Jail locked but empty

Acts 5:21b-24 = No, didn't find out until after sending for them in the morning

Did they immediately send out a search party with directions to recapture them by force?

Acts 5:25-26 = No, they heard that the apostles were back teaching, brought them carefully

Another Trial (Acts 5:27-33)

What charge did the Sanhedrin pose to the apostles? = ... *filled Jerusalem with your teaching*

Acts 5:27-28 = Disobeying their command to be quiet and accusing them of murder

How did the apostles respond?

Acts 5:29-32 = Peter restated the story of Jesus

How did the Sadducees respond to Jesus rising from dead, sitting in heaven & sending the Holy Spirit?

Acts 5:33 = They were outraged and wanted to execute these blasphemers

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Cooler Heads Prevail (Acts 5:34-39)

What kept them from immediately taking these blasphemers outside and stoning them?

Acts 5:34 = A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a leading member of the Sanhedrin
Gamaliel was the most famous Jewish teacher of his time. Who was one of his students?

Acts 22:1-3 = Paul had been trained as a Pharisee under Gamaliel

What did Gamaliel want the Sanhedrin to consider?

Acts 5:35-37 = He cited a couple of recent examples of false prophets

Why did Gamaliel bring up the cases of Theudas and Judas?

Acts 5:38-39 = Told them to let time show whether from man or from God

Did his speech have any effect?

Acts 5:40 = Yes, they released them with warnings, but punished them first

The Apostles Respond (Acts 5:41-42)

Did the flogging help strengthen their point and deter the apostles from talking further about Jesus?

Acts 5:41 = No, the apostles were thrilled that they had suffered for the sake of Jesus

Did this arrest and flogging help get the apostles to quiet down about this Jesus fellow?

Acts 5:42 = No, they continued to proclaim the gospel boldly and openly

What guidance did Paul give us about how to be like Peter and the apostles?

Colossians 4:5 = *Make the most of every opportunity*

Closing Prayer = Pray through Acts 4:24-30

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When I do an act of kindness, do I bask in my pride or give the glory to God?
(Acts 3:12, 16; 4:8-12; 5:1-11; Jeremiah 9:23-24; 1 Cor 10:31; Galatians 6:14; 1 Peter 4:10-11)
2. How has God worked through me beyond my personal abilities?
(Acts 4:13-14; 1:8; Exodus 3:10-4:17; Isaiah 6:5-9; Jeremiah 1:4-10; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 12:7-10)
3. How likely am I to speak about Jesus when it is culturally inappropriate?
(Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29, 40-42; 1 Kings 22:6-8, 13-14, 24-28; Romans 1:14-16; Philippians 1:12-14; 1 Peter 3:15-16)
4. What about my relationship with Jesus can I not help but speak about?
(Acts 4:19-20; Job 32:17-20; Jeremiah 20:9; Luke 19:37-40; 1 Corinthians 9:16)
5. When have I asked God to make me bolder and stronger for Him?
(Acts 4:24-31; 14:3; 28:31; Psalm 138:3; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Ephesians 6:19-20)