

“Would you expect to meet an angel in prison?”

Acts 5:17-24 NIV

“¹⁷Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people all about this new life.’

“²¹At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²²But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³‘We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.’

“²⁴On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to. ²⁵Then someone came and said, ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.’ ²⁶At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.”

During my life and ministry, I visited prisoners in numerous jails and prisons.

They include: the Clackamas County Jail in Oregon, the Oregon State Prison, the California State Prison in San Luis Obispo, the L.A. County Hall of Justice, a few juvenile facilities, the L.A. County Jail and a county jail in Iowa.

My visits at L.A. County Jail were so frequent, I was on a first name basis with their chaplain.

The Hollywood church made annual contributions to the chaplain ministry there.

The L.A. County jail granted me the privilege of meeting some inmates in the attorney’s room.

In case you wonder “What kind of members did you have in that church, Bob?”

Not all of those I visited were our members.

Many had moved from the East and Midwest. Some were held in tight security.

One fellow began writing me, who’d been sent to federal prison twice for bank robbery,

We corresponded for years and I visited him.

He repeatedly said he regretted his past life and told me several times how he intended to change and give his life to God.

He was scheduled for release.

I looked forward to helping in his new life.



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Within days of his freedom, he robbed a pharmacy, got caught, and I never heard from him again.

I saw prisoners of all sizes, shapes, ages, races, and backgrounds.

Yet I never saw an angel or messenger of God in a prison, jail, or detention facility.

You don't expect to see angels in jails, do you?

In our text, an angel not only arrived; the angel arranged a jail break— he freed 12 guys.

In the early days of our Hollywood ministry, some folks asked me to go to court and be a character witness for them.

In nearly every case, the evidence for their guilt was so strong, I quit agreeing to do that.

In some instances, what so-called church members had done was absolutely disgusting

What evidence did authorities bring when they charged the twelve men in our text?

The days might not be far off when you and I find ourselves charged as the Twelve were.

At least one case now before the Supreme Court pertains to our text.

Acts 5:12-16 (NIV) gives vital details.

Two powerful forces came into play.



L.A. Co. Criminal Courts Bldg.

First: people who perform extraordinary things attract attention.

Elon Musk attained fame even before he bought Twitter.

Had the Twelve Apostles pooled all their money, they still couldn't have afforded a Tesla or even a battery for one.

Yet God worked many incredible miracles through the 12 that Musk will never equal:

“The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people . . . People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.”

In the 1960s many churches featured “Healing Services.”

They often drew great crowds.

A few of our Hollywood members were attracted to those “miracle” churches.

A young man who lost his sight from diabetes complications started attending Hollywood.

The Hollywood young people included him in their activities.

Promising him that he'd be healed of his blindness, those attracted to miracles took the young man to a healing service.



At that service, folks prayed intensely for him, but he left the service unchanged.

The “miracle” church leaders blamed the healing failure on the young man’s lack of faith.

Disappointment devastated the young man.

His diabetic condition spiraled downward and he died not long afterward.

In the Apostles’ case: “All of them were healed.”

Thus: “More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”

God’s miracles through the Apostles attracted attention.

A second powerful force came into play.

Remember Ananias and Sapphira, the couple “who lied and died”?

Hearing about that incident made half-hearted folks afraid to join the church.

The Holy Spirit allows no deceit.

“¹³No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.”

Our text begins: “¹⁷Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.”¹

Who were the Sadducees?

Most were from the elite, wealthy, priestly class.
They didn’t believe in an afterlife.

They said that God rewards people in this life.
Sadducees were rich and assumed their goodness.

The high priest was a Sadducee.

He headed a council of 70 elite Jewish men (70 & 1) called the Sanhedrin.

That group also included many Pharisees, a Jewish sect that did believe in the resurrection.
They governed all religious matters.

Though the Romans ruled the known world, they allowed the Sanhedrin to decide many matters in Israel.

We’ve looked at two powerful forces:

First: the attraction of extraordinary wonders.
Second: the fearsome power of the Holy Spirit.
A **third** powerful force is jealousy.

¹ In the Greek text, the first word of verse 17 is anastás (ἀναστάς) a participle meaning to *raise, stand up, or rise*. Luke, the author of *Acts*, seems to be noting that in protesting the Apostles’ preaching concerning Jesus’ resurrection, jealousy *arose* in the hearts of the Sadducees. Most translations appear to miss this wordplay. The KJV and the NASB do, at least, note the word *rise* or *rose up* in the verse.

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The Sadducees and members of the Sanhedrin were among the richest, most powerful people in first century Israel.

Those 71 guys equaled a combined Senate and Supreme Court, and even possessed police power.

Why were they jealous of guys who had no money and virtually no power?

They thought people should praise and honor them.

In other words, they expected folks to idolize them--consider them stars or gods.

When the Jesus performed miracles, people praised God.²

When the Apostles did miracles, taught resurrection, and repentance, church folks praised God.³

Of all people, the High priest and his associates should have been happy when folks praised God and thankful Jesus defeated death.

Instead they were jealous because folks didn't honor and respect them.

“¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.”

When they first built the present LA County Jail in 1963, officials invited some of us ministers to tour the facility.

² Luke 18:35-43

³ Acts 2:42-47

Everything was modern and new.

A fellow minister commented:

“I wouldn't mind staying the night here.”

I responded,

“But you'd get to go home in the morning.”

I don't know the condition of the Jerusalem Jail in 30-35 AD.

From what I have read about prisons of the time, vermin were far more comfortable than the prisoners.

Jails were not usually designed for long term stay.

Neither do I know what plans the Sanhedrin had for the Apostles.

We do know what the Lord wanted.

“¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people all about this new life.’

In the Greek *Acts* text, the Lord's angel used three verbs in the imperative mood.

Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi left a great example of what “imperative” means.

One of his former players said,

“If Coach Lombardi told us to sit, I didn't even look for a chair.”

The Lord didn't want the Apostles sitting.



He ordered:

Go! Stand! Speak! in the Temple courts.

What were they to speak?

"Tell the people all about this new life!"

That's precisely what Jesus instructed the Apostles before his ascension:

"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The word "go" comes from the same verb stem as in Acts 5.

When they got out of jail free, the Apostles didn't stop by Dunkin' Doughnuts, Starbucks, or Scooters.



"At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people."

I think Luke probably wrote the rest of this story in our *Acts* text with a smile.

Imagine the stunning news that came back to the Council when they ordered the sheriff to bring the prisoners back from jail.

They had their full assembly present to deal with those stubborn Jesus resurrection guys.

"But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ 'We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.'

"²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to. ²⁵ Then someone came and said, 'Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.'

The world suffers fatal diseases brought by jealousy, greed, selfishness, sex sin, hate, and fear of death.

Pray that we'll all more boldly tell people "all about this new life."

Jesus taught it.

Jesus lived it and died to show it.

Jesus proved it by his resurrection.

Pray that we all go, stand, and tell his words of life.

He is always with us.

At the end of time, every eye will see Jesus as he punishes all evil and rewards those who go, stand, and tell his words of life.

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