

# Angel's Orders

Acts 5:17-32 NIV

There are a couple of passages I want to use to launch us in to the next part of Luke's letter. They are:

**The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. (Acts 5:12)**

**Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed. (Acts 5:16)**

And, part of verse 12 – the icing on the cake; the straw that broke the camel's back - **they were highly regarded by the people. (Acts 5:12)**

Jerusalem and the surrounding towns had never seen anything like this before. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. He taught in the synagogues and on hillsides. He was crucified and raised from the dead himself.

And now that he was gone, a dozen men have rocked Jerusalem with signs and wonders, healings and exorcisms – greater works; how can you do greater works than Jesus? But that is what Jesus said would happen.

And they, apostles and believers, were highly regarded by the people.

**Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. (Acts 5:17)**

Exalted, high esteem, honored - If there was anything that the Jewish religious leaders who were members of the Sanhedrin wanted, it was this kind of esteem.

It would seem that the religious leaders could not get beyond their wounded pride to consider the miracles that were taking place through the hands of the apostles. It should have been obvious that this was from God. But they were blinded by pride and jealousy. And they were fuming.

**They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. <sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. <sup>20</sup> "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life." (Acts 18-20)**

Pure jealousy prompted the high priest and associates to have all the apostles arrested and placed in jail overnight. This was the same motivation that prompted them to arrest Jesus and put Him to death.

**Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, <sup>10</sup> knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. (Mark 15:9-11)**

A simple plan - They would simply do what they had done before, even though it didn't work the first time. They would arrest the apostles and let them spend the night in jail, pondering their fate. They would then summon for them to appear before the

Council, making every effort to terrify them; to silence them. Simply put, they would "turn up the heat" until they re-established their power and prominence among the people.

These believers had already gone through the trauma of Peter and John's arrest after the healing of the lame beggar in the temple. Now they face the same threat, this time by a more angered group of religious leaders. They were all placed in prison; not just some of the apostles. The high priest meant business this time. He was tired of all the commotion with these gospel preachers.

They didn't care what the apostles believed; they just wanted them to be quiet about it.

David Jeremiah used the following illustration when teaching about gratitude and thanksgiving.

A husband and wife of forty years were sitting on their porch reminiscing on a warm summer evening. Reflecting on his faithful friend and partner, and all they had been through, the husband welled up a bit, turned to his wife and said, "Woman, you have been so good to me; such a wonderful wife all these years, it's all I can do to keep from tellin' ya."

Gratitude is an attitude until it is spoken. Then it becomes thanksgiving.

The same is true of evangelism. You can be grateful that God sent his Son to die in your place, live a faithful, moral lifestyle and

call it lifestyle evangelism. But evangelism is not evangelism until it is spoken.

Evangelism is the faithful use of life and lips to communicate the gospel of Christ.

Not long after Ellen and I were married, we moved back to my hometown, and I went to work for my dad. I served a 4-year carpenter apprenticeship. That's where I met Larry (not our Larry). We became good friends. Hunted together; and were working together when dad died.

One day, and I don't recall who brought up the subject, but we were talking about faith, religion, church, and etc. I ask him about his relationship with Jesus. Larry had served in the military and did a tour in Viet Nam. He told me that during his tour in Viet Nam that he prayed and told God that if he would let him live through his tour in Viet Nam, that he would never ask him for another thing. And as far as I know, Larry has kept his word.

Larry might believe that he is being faithful to God by keeping his word, but is that what God asked him to do? No. God asked Larry, along with everyone else to come to Jesus; come to his son and then go tell everyone about this new life.

An angel of the Lord opened the jail and told them to, "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

In short, go do what Jesus said to do when he left.

But, this was not the only angelic activity going on. The powers of darkness are slick; crafty. Just like they fooled my friend Larry into believing that in keeping his promise he was being faithful to God; they fooled Ananias over a piece of land; they were certainly doing a number on the Sanhedrin with pride and jealousy.

And, they would have duped the apostles, if they could. They will use anything they can against you, especially your past.

Rather than go tell, the powers of darkness would have been thrilled if, after spending another night in jail, Peter would have done something like this:

"Lord, you remember how badly I used to swear? I even cussed at the people at your trial who asked me if I was your disciple. Well, Lord, I'm not worthy to teach or preach your word, but, you got me out of prison again, so I won't ever swear again."

How would that have gone over? But isn't that how a lot of Christians think?

The powers of darkness don't mind a bit if you believe, as long as you keep quiet about it. Shush. Don't say nothin'. You might offend somebody.

You can be politically correct and playing right into evil's hands...

Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

Before breakfast?

<sup>21</sup> At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

Go, take a stand – make a stand; what the angel was saying involved more than a physical presence in the temple courts. Go, take a stand for the message of new life. The apostles would do this in the temple and before the Sanhedrin before the day was over.

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. <sup>22</sup> But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, <sup>23</sup> "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." <sup>24</sup> On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

The apostles had followed the angel's instructions. They went to the temple as soon as the doors were open, you could say; daybreak. 'Take a stand in the temple courts; go where all the people would be gathered. And they began teaching, just as they had been doing. It was "business as usual" for the apostles. The people had to take note of this, especially if the arrest of the apostles had become public knowledge.

Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." <sup>26</sup> At 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.

<sup>27</sup> Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup> “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

<sup>29</sup> Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

All of the events of the previous night: the appearance of the angel of the Lord, the escape of the apostles, their early morning appearance at the temple courts; were unknown to the members of the Sanhedrin. And so they began the morning just as they had planned it the day before. The members of the Sanhedrin were summoned, and next, officers were sent to bring the apostles from jail to stand before them. You can imagine the alarm when the officers return empty-handed with the above explanation.

The tables have suddenly turned. The chief priests and the Sanhedrin no longer have the upper hand. They never did, but now they know it.

I am reminded of email I read this week. An old prospector shuffled into town leading an old tired mule. The man headed straight for the only saloon to clear his parched throat.

He walked up and tied his mule to the hitch rail. As he stood there, brushing some of the dust from his face and clothes, a young gunslinger stepped out of the saloon with a gun in one hand and a bottle of whiskey in the other. The young gunslinger looked at the old man and laughed, saying, "Hey old man, have you ever danced?"

The old man looked up at the gunslinger and said, "No, I never did dance... Never really wanted to."

A crowd had gathered as the gunslinger grinned and said, "Well, you old fool, you're gonna dance now," and started shooting at the old man's feet. The old prospector, not wanting to get a toe blown off, started hopping around like a flea on a hot skillet.

Everybody was laughing, fit to be tied. When his last bullet had been fired, the young gunslinger, still laughing, holstered his gun and turned around to go back into the saloon. The old man turned to his pack mule, pulled out a double-barrelled shotgun, and cocked both hammers. The loud clicks carried clearly through the desert air.

The crowd stopped laughing immediately. The young gunslinger heard the sounds too, and he turned around very slowly. The silence was deafening.

The crowd watched as the young gunman stared at the old timer and the large gaping holes of those twin barrels. The barrels of the shotgun never wavered in the old man's hands. He quietly asked, "Son, have you ever kissed a mule square on the lips?"

The gunslinger swallowed hard and said, "No sir..... But... I've always wanted to."

Just as the young gunslinger lost the upper hand when he ran out of bullets, the Sanhedrin's guns were empty. A locked jail had no power over an angel of the Lord. The powers of darkness had filled the high priest and associated with pride and jealousy and duped them into thinking that they had control of the situation.

But, the tables were turned. And the Sanhedrin was about to get it with both barrels.

Yes. You told us not to preach.

Yes. You arrested us and threw us in jail.

Yes. You *are* guilty of Jesus' blood.

Yes. We are going to continue to preach. We must obey God rather than men. Does this offend you?

When Jesus let this earth, he gave clear orders to his followers to take this message of new life to the ends of the earth; teach, baptize, and teach obedience: all the words of this life.

Some think that these marching orders were just for the apostles – a select few. If this was true, then the church should have died out soon after the last apostle died.

Obviously, the marching orders were for all disciples. Evangelism is the faithful use of life and lips to communicate the gospel of Christ.

In our society today, the powers of darkness are doing all they can to convince people that the Gospel message is irrelevant and offensive.

It's okay to believe whatever you want to believe. You can talk about any religion you want to, but not Christianity. It's old fashion and offensive. All that blood and stuff...

If the powers of darkness can't stop you from becoming a Christian, they will do everything they can to keep you from being an effective Christian. They don't mind one bit if you believe, as long as you keep quiet about it.

The next time opportunity presents itself to tell about this new life, remember this little rhyme:

**Take a stand;**

**Obey God rather than man.**

**You have the upper hand.**

(Say it with me)

Angel's orders.

Just as the angel opened the jail and freed the apostles, if the son of man has set you free, you are free indeed.