

The Apostles are Persecuted

(Acts 5:14-42)

Introduction

[Teacher, discuss persecution in terms the children will relate to; use the following questions as discussion starters...] Has anyone been mean to you because you are a Christian? Has anyone ever made fun of you because of what you believe? Has anyone ever laughed at you because you wanted to do the "right" thing? Has anyone tried to make you feel weird for not wanting to laugh at a dirty joke or join in a mean trick? Do other children make fun of you, laugh at you, call you names, or even hit you when you try to tell them about the Lord Jesus? Have you ever been left out of an activity because you've let others know you believe in Jesus? That is called "*persecution*." To be persecuted means to be treated with meanness or cruelty because of what you believe.

The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12, "*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" This is a promise! You can expect it to happen sometime in your life. Today's lesson is about a time when Peter and John were persecuted for telling others about Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Father, persecution is NOT something I look forward to, but I do pray that I am bold enough in my walk with you that other people know that I am a Christian. Give us the courage to tell others that Jesus is the only way to be saved, even if we are persecuted. Today as we study Your word, show us how we are to live out our lives in such a way that others will want to know You better. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (Matthew 5:11)

Lesson

The last few weeks we've been learning about the early Christians. After Jesus ascended back up to Heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to the believers to give them power to live their lives in a way that pleases God and the courage and boldness to tell others about what Jesus did for mankind on the cross.

We learned that the Holy Spirit gave Peter and John special power to heal a lame man. And then the Spirit enabled Peter to boldly preach to the people about their need for Jesus. Next, we learned that even though the Holy Spirit had come and given the people special powers and gifts, they were not protected from Satan's temptations. Ananias and Sapphira were tempted by Satan to lie.

Today we learn that just as people hated Jesus and wanted to kill Him when He was here on earth, so people hated the early Christians, like Peter and John, who were continuing to tell people about Jesus.

Peter and John taught that Jesus is God and while many people became believers, the Jewish religious leaders were jealous and tried to stop them. But the apostles kept preaching and God confirmed their message with great signs and wonders doing miracles of healing among the people. And, more and more people turned to the Lord.

Acts 5:14-16

Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. (15) As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. (16) Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

Many people heard about Jesus and believed. Many sick people were brought to the apostles and were healed. When Jesus was on earth, He healed the sick; now that He had returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit living inside the apostles was healing the sick.

You would think that the Jewish religious leaders would be happy to see people coming to God to be saved and sick people being healed. But instead, they were jealous and angry.

Why do you think they were jealous? These men claimed to know God and were the leaders of the people, supposedly teaching them about God, but they clearly did not have the same kind of power to do miracles that the apostles had. They couldn't have the power because they did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Because they didn't believe in Jesus, they could not have the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of them giving them the power to do things for God.

When the Jewish religious leaders saw that Jesus, even though He was not here physically among the living, was still drawing people away from following them, they threw Peter and John back in jail. Again, God's enemy, the devil, was trying to stop God's work.

Acts 5:17-18

The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. (18) They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

Then, something amazing happened that night!

Acts 5:19-20

But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, (20) "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!"

Woe! That must have been a surprise for Peter and John to suddenly be brought out of prison by an angel! The prisons in those days were highly secure. Peter and John, no doubt, had their ankles and wrists chained to the wall. And, the guards knew that the penalty for letting a prisoner escape was death, so they guarded the prison with their lives! There's no way out of those dungeons. But suddenly Peter and John found themselves with an angel who was telling them to go back to the Temple and tell people about Jesus! Their heads must have been spinning!

Peter and John knew that if they began to tell people about the risen Savior they would surely be persecuted — whipped, beaten, spit upon, and certainly sent back to prison. If you had been Peter or John what would you have done? Would you have said, "You *must* be

crazy! I'm not going out there! I'm out of here!" What did Peter and John do?

Acts 5:21a [Teacher, read only the first sentence...]

So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

Peter and John were so excited about the Lord, they couldn't wait to tell everybody about Jesus! They went to the Temple first thing in the morning! Like Peter and John, we should be so excited to tell others about Jesus that you don't care if people persecute you.

[Teacher, review today's memory verse.] To be "*blessed*" means to be "*joyful on the inside*." But how can you have joy inside when others are treating you badly? Realize that Jesus understands what you're going through because He suffered much more than you. Remember that your persecution can help to make you more like the Lord Jesus. Keep in mind that the one persecuting you — or others that might be watching — may come to know the Lord through your example. Remind yourself that God has promised to reward you in heaven if you remain faithful in spite of persecution.

Instead of being discouraged, you can actually be joyful on the inside when others persecute you or say untrue things about you because you talk about Jesus. The apostles knew they might be persecuted, but they also knew that God wanted them to tell others that only Jesus could save them.

Meanwhile, the Jewish religious leaders didn't know that Peter and John were teaching in the Temple, so they got together and went to the prison to get them.

Acts 5:21b [Teacher, read the rest...]

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial.

Let's see what happened when the Temple guards went to the prison.

Acts 5:22-23

But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, (23) "The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!"

The prison doors were locked and guarded, but the prison was empty!

Acts 5:24-25

When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. (25) Then someone arrived with startling news: "The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!"

So, they all went to the Temple...

Acts 5:26-28

The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. (27) Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. (28) "We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name!" he said. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

It's interesting that the high priest and the captain of the Temple didn't ask how they got out of prison! They were more concerned about trying to keep Peter and John from telling any more people about Jesus. They didn't believe in Jesus' resurrection and didn't want to hear about it. Nor did they want to hear that they had been responsible for Jesus' death. But Peter and John weren't afraid of what the high priest and the captain of the Temple could do to them.

Peter is then filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks out boldly...

Acts 5:29-32

But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. (30) The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the

dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. (31) Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. (32) We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him."

God wants us to obey rules that people set for us except when they tell us to disobey God. Then we must obey God and be willing to pay the penalty human rules demand. [Teacher, lead a discussion about this with the children.]

When the Jewish religious leaders heard Peter preach, they went crazy!

Acts 5:33

When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them.

The Jewish religious leaders were so angry they wanted to put the apostles to death. Fortunately, there was one religious leader that had godly wisdom!

Acts 5:34-35

But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. (35) Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men!"

Gamaliel told the other council members that they better be careful what they do with Peter and John.

Acts 5:38-40

"So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. (39) But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!" (40) The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them

flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

Beaten and warned not to talk about Jesus, the apostles were set free. But that didn't stop them from spreading the good news about Jesus.

Acts 5:41

The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.

God did not keep the apostles from persecution, but He did give them courage as they suffered. God tells us that we, too, may be persecuted if, as Christians, we speak for Him (2 Timothy 3:12). But God can give you courage to tell others about what Jesus did for us on the cross, even if you are persecuted. If you know it is the truth, nothing should stop you!

Do not let persecution discourage you; instead do as Jesus instructed us...

Matthew 5:44

But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!

When someone makes fun of you or laughs at you, show love to him instead of acting as he does. If someone curses you, saying mean things or calling you names, bless him, that is, answer him kindly. Then compliment him for something he does well. Let God show His love to them through you. Pray for those who are unkind to you; ask God to give you courage to continue telling them about Jesus. They may begin to listen to what Jesus can do for them and trust Him as their Savior if you carefully share with them. You may face persecution, but don't be discouraged. Be Joyful; remember, God promises that your reward in heaven will be great (Matthew 5:11). The apostles were not discouraged even though they had been beaten. God gave them courage and joy in their suffering.

Acts 5:42

And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah."

The apostles left rejoicing that they were worthy to suffer for Jesus!

Closing Prayer

Father, we pray that nothing will discourage us from telling people about You. Help us to remember that everyone is born a sinner and in need of a Savior. If we don't tell people about You, they may never hear about Your wonderful plan of Salvation. Fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit like you did Peter and John so that we might have the courage we need to be bold for You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Learning Activities

Game Center

Question Matching

Write questions and their answers on separate cards. Place the answers around the room. Split the class into two teams. Taking turns, pull a question card from a bag. Let the team find the answer. A right answer is worth 500 points. If they can't find the answer, let the other team try to find it. Team with most points wins.

Or, use the following review questions in a discussion or another game of your choice:

1. What does it mean to be persecuted? (To be treated with cruelty.)
2. Why can you be joyful when someone makes fun of you for doing good? (Because you know you are pleasing God.)

3. Why did the Jewish religious leaders become jealous? (Because many people stopped following their advice and were instead following Jesus.)
4. Why did the Jewish religious leaders persecute Peter and John? (Because they were jealous of their popularity.)
5. What did the Jewish religious leaders do to Peter and John? (They threw them into prison.)
6. What amazing thing happened to Peter and John when they were in prison? (An angel brought them out.)
7. What scary thing did the angel tell Peter and John to do? (Go back to the Temple and speak about Jesus, the very thing that got them sent to prison in the first place.)
8. If you had been Peter and John, would you have started preaching to people about Jesus again, knowing you could be sent back to prison?
9. What did Peter and John do? Did they obey the angel or not? (They went to the Temple first thing in the morning! They were so excited to tell others about Jesus they didn't care if they were persecuted.)
10. Why did the apostles rejoice after they were beaten? (They counted it a privilege to suffer for Christ, Who had suffered so much for them.)
11. When is it OK not to obey the law? (When you are told to disobey God. Then we must obey God and be willing to pay the penalty human rules demand.)
12. What did the Jewish religious leaders do when they heard Peter preach? (They went crazy! They were furious and made plans to kill him.)
13. What are you supposed to do if someone makes fun of you or laughs at you? (Show them love instead of acting just like them. Answer them kindly. Let God show His love to them through you. Pray for those who are unkind to you.)

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