

WEDNESDAY 22 June 2022 "Jail Break!" (Acts 5:12-21)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*You've probably heard the warning phrase **'too much of a good thing can be a problem.'** Have you ever experienced it?* Maybe you overindulged in chocolate or some other food. Maybe you pushed yourself too hard or too far in exercise or dieting? Join me back in Jerusalem in the weeks following Jesus' ascension, 2000 years ago, and I wonder if you see as I do, a possible example of this *'too much of a good thing'* situation.

Acts 5:12 says: **"The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. (In the Temple courts) ... They were highly regarded by the people. More and more women and men believed in the Lord Jesus and were added to their number."** Now if we stop right there it sure sounds like a wonderful movement of spiritual revival is happening in Jerusalem. But look closely at what Dr. Luke records for us next... **"As a result, 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."** (Acts 5:15, 16)

It shouldn't be difficult for us to imagine what this looks like, especially if you live in a city with a large homeless population on the street sidewalks or in city parks or vacant lots. *We understand the desperate desire of sick and tormented people to find healing and how that desperation can motivate a person to try almost anything, go almost anywhere they have heard there is help.* Does the phrase *'too much of a good thing can be a problem'* fit in this situation my friends?

Does this remind you of a time when crowds seeking healing gathered outside the house where people had heard Jesus had stayed the night after he had healed some people? You'll find that story in Mark 1:29-39. There is one big difference. Early in the morning, when the crowd was gathering in hopes they might see Jesus, *He slipped out the back door and went out to a solitary place where He prayed, seeking to know what His Father, Almighty God, wanted Him to do about the crowds seeking healing and help?* Peter, this same Peter who is now in the center of attention in Acts 5, came out looking for Jesus, and finding Him praying questioned why He was out here alone praying when a whole crowd was gathering looking for Him, expecting more of the same miracles they had seen the day before. Jesus' response was very powerful: **"Let's go somewhere else - to the nearby villages - so I can preach there also, for that is why I have come."** (Mark 1:39)

I wonder, as these crowds were growing in Jerusalem and people were clamoring to see Peter, expecting maybe he could do for them what they believed he had done for the cripple who was healed in Acts 3, what was Peter thinking? He was in Jerusalem, so I wonder if very early in the mornings or late at night Peter was going over to the Garden of Gethsemane to do what Jesus and His disciples had done several times... *pray, seeking guidance from God?* Was Peter calling together the other disciple/apostles and asking for their advice, *and calling them to prayer as they sought guidance from Jesus?* Luke is silent about that, focusing instead on the phenomenon of crowds gathering believing that something miraculous might happen if even Peter's shadow fell on them as he walked by. That troubles me, what about you? *So easily our focus can be diverted from worshipping God, and pursuing our relationship with Jesus, to being enamored by something a person is doing or saying and our hearts are drawn to follow the person rather than Jesus.* Do you see any evidence of that here my friends? May I ask, do you see it where you live in the world?

I celebrate Acts 5:14 **"More and more men and women believed in the Lord Jesus and were added to their number."** But I'm concerned about what happened next: **"People brought the sick into the streets...so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on them as he passed by."** (Acts 5:15) I urge us all to take a close look at ourselves, our churches or whatever spiritual movements are happening in your city... *who or what is the focus? If it's not Jesus, how far down the list must you go before you find Jesus when considering the priorities in the churches or spiritual movements of your city?* Please give that some serious thought. What does Jesus see as He looks at your city?

Now while this 'spiritual chaos' was happening, the religious leaders and even those responsible for keeping peace and order in the big city of Jerusalem were noticing, and they were getting increasingly concerned. From their perspective, that old phrase was true... *'too much of a good thing was becoming a big problem in Jerusalem'*! So, the record says: **"Then the High Priest and other leaders were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail."** For Peter and John this was now the second time they've been behind bars for being obedient to what Jesus had told them to do and say. I wonder what you think these disciples of Jesus talked about that night as they sat on the floor of this **'public jail'**?

The phrase **'public jail'** may have been a jail cell out in the public, so people could stand around, perhaps on all sides, and look through the bars at those inside, almost like looking at a caged animal. If so, can you imagine the conversations as those apostles inside the cage are talking to those standing outside the cage? I wonder if someone in the crowd shouted something similar to what the thief on the cross next to Jesus had shouted: *"hey you guys, if you have the power to heal people and drive out demons then unleash some of your power and free yourselves, open the locks, spread the bars apart so you can just walk out of that jail cell?!"*

Eventually the crowds thinned out, people went home for the night and these men who had been together with Jesus for so many months were left alone to ponder their situation. Oh how I would love to know what was said that night in that public jail cell. I wonder how long it took for one of them to say, *'hey brothers, let's talk with Jesus about this. He told us He'd always be with us, so let's see what Jesus has to say about this situation and He wants us to do next.'* And I believe they prayed, maybe long into the night. Perhaps they finally began to doze off into sleep when suddenly they were stunned by a visitor!!

Luke describes it this way: ***"During the night an angel of the LORD opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 'Go stand in the temple courts', he said, 'and tell the people all about this new life.'*** (Acts 5:19,20) Look at them... stunned, shocked, overwhelmed, and standing in the Jerusalem city square FREED! The angel is not named, nor does he engage any discussion or answer any questions. Have you noticed the Biblical accounts of angelic visits normally are very specific. The angel comes from heaven to earth, to a specific person or situation, accomplishes by great power whatever they had been sent to do, sometimes speaks a specific message from God, and then leaves, returning back to heaven from which he came. *I wonder if you've ever had a visitation of an angel.*

- Luke doesn't tell us what they did next, I presume they went to wherever they had been staying the nights these days, and discussed what had just happened, discussed the angel's message, and then prayed thanking God for clarity about what they should do next. The record says: ***"At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people."*** (Acts 5:21) I imagine at first light people were streaming into the city square, coming to the public jail to see the apostles behind bars. But oh, my can you imagine their surprise when the jail door stands open and the cell is empty!? But it wasn't long and here they come, the apostles, walking from where they had a few hours sleep, up to the Temple to do what God had sent an angel to instruct them. Now do you notice my friends, they did exactly what Jesus had done when the crowd of sick people had gathered outside the house waiting for Him to heal them? *They focused instead on telling the story of Jesus and proclaiming the truth about this new life available in Jesus!*

Now let's pause right here and ponder an important truth my friends. Oh, very good things were happening as people were being healed, *but the primary purpose Jesus had commissioned them to focus their lives on, telling the story of Jesus and teaching the people what Jesus had taught them about this new life in relationship with Jesus, was being overshadowed by the miracles.* Jesus did for His disciples what God the Father had done for Jesus, when surrounded by crowds demanding miracles... ***'keep the main thing the main thing!'***

Have you ever heard that important phrase?

So, I wonder for you and me, **what is the MAIN THING, the primary reason you are alive today, your primary life purpose?** If you are a Jesus follower, what does Jesus want to accomplish IN and THROUGH you today? Here's a song to help us consider these important questions... what does your heart say?

Today's Scripture is Acts 5:12-21.