

=LIFE OF PETER=
Lesson 11
Peter Suffers and Glories

AIM: to teach my Christian pupils steadfastness in the face of ridicule, and to teach my unsaved pupils that they need to be saved.

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask your pupils for what they have been punished? In what ways have they suffered? Probably most of their punishment has been deserved; all of us have to fight against our sinful natures. In what ways have they suffered for the cause of Christ? Has there been ridicule at school or in the neighborhood for a Christian conviction or for witnessing for Jesus? Our lesson about Peter today teaches us the attitude which should be displayed by Christians when they suffer for Jesus' sake.

INTRODUCTION: A mild threat and an overnight stay in the jail was the beginning of attempts made by Satan to stop the spread of the Gospel in the early days of the ministry of Peter. If the Devil could stop the testimony and the preaching of the apostles, the battle of the evil against good would be greatly aided. Peter and John had been arrested and put into jail for preaching in the temple. After they had been released, they were commanded by the religious authorities not to preach about Jesus again. Peter and John informed the temple rulers that they should decide for themselves whether people should obey man-made ordinances that would be contrary to God-given commandments. When Peter and John were released, they made their way to the church and asked that prayer be made for them, asking the Lord for boldness to continue to speak for Him. They were convinced that they should continue to preach.

I. PETER DEMONSTRATED HIS CONVICTIONS. See Acts 5:12-25.

1. He went back to preaching about Jesus with the rest of the apostles. He was determined to get out the Gospel.
 - 1) He went back to the place where he was when he was arrested by the Jewish authorities. He went to Solomon's Porch—the raised embankment on the east side of the temple which remained from the original temple of Solomon. Crowds gathered to hear him.
 - 2) People were convinced of his preaching. The signs and wonders which Peter was able to perform through the power of God convinced people of the truth of the Gospel. Large crowds of men and women were drawn to the Lord through his preaching.
2. He walked among all the people who had gathered to see and hear him.
 - 1) He walked up and down on the public street. He would leave the relative protectiveness of the temple to walk openly in public. Many people had been brought into Jerusalem from outlying country towns. These people, as well as the crowds from Jerusalem, were sick bodily and mentally. Some were troubled by unclean spirits.
 - 2) Some of the sick people hoped that at least Peter's shadow would fall on them. Peter's shadow would have no more power than his touch; God did not need either Peter's touch or his shadow to accomplish the work which He desired to do through Peter. The faith of the sick and the hopeless was such that just Peter's shadow falling upon them made them partakers of the miracles which Jesus was performing through him.
3. Peter humbly did Christ's service. He could easily have become proud and have felt important because the people magnified him. He was the leader and the most prominent of the apostles. He obviously maintained his earlier conviction—that he had no natural power or holiness within himself to do the Lord's service. Review Acts 3:12. See I Peter 5:5.
4. Peter continued to preach and to minister in spite of the presence of the high priest and his associates. Peter did not think, "I must seek a means of escape, for the high priest did warn that I should not preach and perform miracles in the name of Jesus."

II. PETER SUFFERED FOR HIS CONVICTIONS. Read Acts 5:26-41.

1. The high priest began a course of hostility against Peter and the other apostles.
 - 1) He was enraged because of the growing popularity of the apostles. He had them disgraced by ordering them thrown into the common prison. They were treated like criminals, rather than like men of note who were held in high esteem by the people.
 - 2) He was determined to have them sentenced to death. The next morning he called together not only the Sanhedrin, the seventy men who composed the highest Jewish governing body, but also the senate. The high priest called a total of one hundred sixteen judges to sit in judgment on Peter and the other apostles.
 - 3) Satan meets any good work with opposition; it would have been strange if their work had gone on unchecked. Peter knew that the Devil is the adversary of everyone who seeks to live for the Lord. I Peter 5:8.
2. Peter and the other apostles were soon to know that God saw their predicament. God sent an angel to release them from prison. The angel came in the night, opened the prison doors, and brought the apostles out. He reminded them of Jesus' command to preach the Gospel, telling them to go back to the temple and to speak the words of life to the people.
 - 1) God prevented any of the keepers of the prison from seeing the apostles leave. No one knew of the absence of the apostles until the officers of the temple had gone to get them so that they might appear before the council and the senate.
 - 2) Peter and the apostles were enabled by God to be bold in proclaiming the Gospel. Without hesitation, they went back to the scene of their arrest early the next morning. (It was just before the grey light of dawn shone in the sky that they were released from prison.) Peter spoke for the apostles, preaching without compromising the Gospel message. The sermon included the fact that all of them were sinners; they were guilty of causing Jesus to be cursed in suffering the death of the cross. It also included the facts that Jesus arose from the dead and that He is a Prince and the Saviour—He is to be obeyed and to be trusted for salvation. The Gospel message concluded with the fact that they must believe on Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Peter gave testimony to the fact that they all were witnesses of these events and actualities. Without resisting the arresting officers, Peter and the other apostles had gone to stand before this questioning body. See Matthew 10:19.
 - 3) Peter restated the fact that God is to be obeyed rather than man. He pointed out that the command not to preach in Jesus' name was a command of man, not of the Lord. Acts 5:29
 - 4) The council and the senate were convinced by Gamaliel that Peter and the other apostles should not be put to death. Acts 5:34-39
3. Peter and the apostles were beaten for their preaching. Deuteronomy 25:2 describes the beating that Peter and the other apostles received. Their punishment was accompanied with open shame as well as great physical suffering.

III. PETER PRAISED GOD FOR ALLOWING HIM TO SUFFER. See Acts 5:41.

1. Peter knew that events were going according to Jesus' predictions inside His will for Peter to be a preacher. Jesus had warned His disciples that they would suffer. Matthew 10:17; John 16:1-4.
2. The suffering which the apostles were enduring were counted by them as an honor. It was a sign to them that they were living apart from the world, as they had been commanded. John 15:18-27.
3. Peter knew the happiness that comes from suffering for righteousness' sake. See I Peter 3:14. By contrast, he had known the unhappy times of suffering for wrongdoing. I Peter 3:17. See Hebrews 12:6-11. (Recall with your class the great heartbreak which Peter suffered after he had denied Jesus, the time that Jesus desired to wash Peter's feet, the time that he began to sink beneath the waves, the time when Peter said that Jesus should not die, and the time when Peter drew the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane.)

- IV. PETER'S SUFFERINGS DID NOT STOP HIS WORK FOR THE LORD. See Acts 5:42.
1. Peter and the other apostles immediately went back to their daily preaching and teaching. Hard times did not cause them to shrink from performing the duties which Jesus had commanded them to do.
 2. Peter advised other Christians not to be afraid of those who are evil. The Lord will take care of His own. I Peter 3:12. Peter knew that the Lord was watching over him and that nothing could harm him except that it be according to the will of God. I Peter 3:17.

CONCLUSION: Evil will not diminish in its fight against right! Satan will not decrease his number of attacks against God's forces. Peter learned as he went about serving the Lord that the Devil constantly wages war against those who actively serve the Lord. Peter learned to rejoice in suffering, because an obvious evidence of the Lord's pleasure with his service was that he was counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake.