

¹² And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. ... ¹⁷ Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸ and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. ¹⁹ But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." ²¹ And when they heard that, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. ²² But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, ²³ saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" ²⁴ Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. ²⁵ So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" ²⁶ Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, ²⁸ saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" ²⁹ But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. ³¹ Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Acts 5:12, 17-32 A 4-28-19 Rev. 1:4-18 John 20:19-31 Psalm 98 Responsive Psalm: 116
Hymns: 733, 190, 767, 451

KEEP STANDING AND SPEAKING THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE!

Dear fellow believers in Christ, our living Savior,

Our text takes place in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' resurrection and ascension back to heaven. How Jesus had strengthened His disciples! He enabled them to work miracles of healing and to fearlessly and joyfully spread the message all over Jerusalem that He is the promised Messiah who had risen from the dead. As a result the Bible gives us the exciting news that "*believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women*"! (Ac. 5:14).

The Jewish leaders had the disciples put in prison. There are always people who hate Jesus and His Word and His people. They may persecute us, maybe severely, for our faith in Jesus. Jesus assures us, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil*

against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Mt. 5:10-12).

God sent an angel who let the disciples out of prison. The angel told them, *“Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life;”* which they did. The Jewish leaders were told that ‘somehow’ the disciples were out on the temple grounds preaching to the people. They had the disciples brought to them and told them, *“Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?”* The Jewish leaders thought that by having Jesus put to death they had put an end to Him. But they were wrong. Jesus had said, *“I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”* (Jn. 10:17-18). The only reason Jesus’ enemies could Him put to death was because He had allowed them to. Jesus willingly gave up His life on the cross, and then came back to life, to save all people from our sins.

The high priest told the disciples, *“You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.”* The Jewish religious leaders were the ones who taught their own doctrine, that a person gets to heaven by good works. The disciples taught God’s doctrine, that no one, including the Jewish leaders, gets to heaven by good works. We’re saved by faith alone in Jesus and what He did for us.

The high priest accused the disciples, *“You intend to bring this Man’s”* (Jesus’) *“blood on us!”* Actually, the Jewish leaders had done that to themselves when they cried out with the crowd to Pontius Pilate, *“His”* (Jesus’) *“blood be on us and our children”* (Mt. 27:25). Today there’s a growing number of unbelievers who think that they’re the good ones and we Christians are evil. They accuse us Christians of being unloving and intolerant troublemakers – the very evils of which they themselves are guilty.

The Jewish leaders commanded the disciples to stop telling people about Jesus. The disciples replied, *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”* After Jesus rose from the dead He told His disciples, *“...it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things”* (Lk. 24:46-48). The disciples told the Jewish leaders that they were going to obey the Son of God and continue to preach and teach salvation in Him.

No one, no matter what position of earthly authority he or she has, is above God and His Word. There are those who are trying to silence us Christians. We say with the disciples, *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

Jesus has told us, *“The gates of hell shall not prevail against [My Church]”* (Mt. 16:18). Jesus is stronger than the devil and the world, and they will never stop us and defeat us: Christ’s Church!

“If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’” (We will suffer in this life as Christ’s people.) *“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* – Romans 8:31, 35-37.

Peter had denied Jesus, and he and all the other disciples had deserted Him. After Jesus was put to death the disciples hid behind locked doors. But Jesus caused them to grow in their faith and in their understanding of Him and His Word. Now, standing before the same authorities who had Jesus crucified the disciples confronted them with the truth: *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you”* (emphasizing *“you”* in the original) *“murdered by hanging on a tree.”*

Are there times when, because we want to be accepted and we’re afraid how people may react, we fail to stand up for Jesus and His Word, that we don’t honor Jesus before others with our words and with our lives? The eleventh chapter of Hebrews lists many Old Testament heroes of faith, saying, *“Out of weakness [they] were made strong”* by God (v. 34). The same God who made their weak faith strong and the disciples’ weak faith strong makes our weak faith strong.

Through His disciples Jesus gave the Jewish leaders another chance to hear the truth about Him so they could believe in Him and be saved! The disciples told them, *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus.... Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”* The Jewish leaders hated to hear that they were sinners who need to repent. But they needed to hear it and take it to heart so they could be saved.

“God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” – 2 Peter 3:9. In His amazing grace Jesus wanted to save even those who hated Him and had Him crucified. In His amazing grace Jesus has saved even you and me. Jesus has broken through our natural proud resistance and shown us that we are not basically good by nature, but sinful, and that we can’t make up for our sins by good works, and be good enough to go to heaven. Jesus has led us to see our sinfulness before Him, and repent of our sins. And Jesus has brought us to trust in Him alone for our forgiveness and salvation!

The disciples told the Jewish leaders, *“We are His witnesses to these things.”* The disciples had been with Jesus and been taught by Him for three years. After He was put to death they saw Him alive again. They knew Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world. Earlier they had told the Jewish leaders, *“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (Ac. 4:20). Jesus’ love for His disciples and Jesus’ love working in them compelled them to keep telling people about repentance, and forgiveness and eternal life in Him!

By the faith Jesus has worked in our hearts we say with the disciples “*We are His witnesses to these things.*” Through Jesus’ Word we know the truth about Him and salvation in Him. With the eyes of faith we’ve seen Jesus die on the cross, and we see Him risen again and living. By the faith and understanding Jesus has given us we know He’s the Son of God and Savior of the world.

When the disciples said, “*We are His witnesses to these things,*” they added, “*and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him*” (that is, obey God by the faith He gives us). Every time we share God’s Word with someone, the Holy Spirit is there actively working through His Word to bring that person to faith. We don’t have to try to somehow convince someone to believe in Jesus and what His Word says. We just share the Word, and the Holy Spirit does His work through His Word. “Jesus, strengthen us to speak to others “all the words of this life”: about sin and repentance, and salvation by faith in You.”

When the angel freed the disciples from prison he told them, “Go,” (from the original, “*Keep on going!*”), “*stand in the temple and speak*” (from the original, “*keep on speaking!*”) “*to the people all the words of this life.*” Jesus urged His disciples to keep on spreading the Good News that He died on the cross for the sins of the whole world and rose again, and that everyone who believes in Him has the forgiveness of all of his sins and eternal life in heaven. Jesus, our risen and living Savior, tells you and me, **KEEP STANDING AND SPEAKING THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE!** Amen.