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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1710 ~ Peter and John Threatened.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

In some countries around the world, Christian church leaders are threatened by government authorities. Sometimes they're arrested and charged, given false trials and sent to prison or labour camps for many years. This is done to stop the spread of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But does this strategy work?

For many years, a large Chinese church lived in relative safety from persecution by the authorities. The area was considered a liberated zone. The pastor leading the church and his wife had a grown-up daughter named Esther. Even though it was illegal under the law to do so, the pastor shared the Gospel with her while she was a child.

Esther said her father insisted on church attendance every week and quizzed her on the sermon's contents. She said she didn't truly believe and she didn't really want to go to church. In 2009, the time came for a government crackdown on the church's activities. Esther's parents were arrested, along with six other leaders from their church, and sentenced to labour camps. The arrests were a huge blow to Esther's faith but her father accepted his imprisonment as a test of his faith.

Slowly, the Holy Spirit began to work on Esther, maturing her through this hardship. She stopped hating the people who had betrayed her parents and she also stopped being angry with her parents for putting themselves in danger. She realised the only thing that would sustain her through her parents' imprisonment was to trust in God.

God also gave Esther a deeper understanding of forgiveness. She struggled to forgive the people who hurt her parents, but she knew she must. She said that if she didn't, it would make other people, even unbelievers, think that she wasn't serious about Christianity, as then she would be showing that she didn't trust the Lord.

The government officials hoped that their crackdown against the church would drive people away from Christianity and away from God. For Esther, it did just the opposite. Persecution against her parents turned Esther's faith into solid rock. She learnt that God is faithful and wants others to know about the Jesus she knows.

If persecution by the authorities didn't stop a young woman in China in this century from clinging to her faith, did it make much difference to Peter and John in the days of the early church?

DRAMA - [The Bible In Living Sound](#).

Following arrest and imprisonment for the night after healing a crippled man, Peter and John were brought before the ruling Jewish council to have their case heard. Instead of trumping up false charges against them, the high priest Caiaphas asked them instead, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter spoke to these leaders in a bold but polite manner. He gave the glory to Jesus as being the most important part of building God's kingdom. If a cornerstone or capstone was removed from a building, the building would fall down. Peter told these leaders that they had rejected Him and killed Jesus but God had raised Him to life again. It was the power of Jesus' name that had brought the crippled man healing.

Peter went on to say that more importantly, people's souls are saved from spiritual sickness or sin by Jesus also. In Acts, Chapter 4, Peter made it clear to these rulers that salvation is found in no one else. He said: "For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." The healed man stood there as evidence that what Peter was saying was true.

Caiaphas noted that Peter was an uneducated man but he couldn't deny that a notable miracle had been done. So Peter and John were sent outside while the leaders discussed among themselves what they should do to punish them. On the one hand, thousands of people were praising God for the miracle and that Peter and John had done no crime. If the leaders punished the apostles in any way, the people would turn against their leaders. This made them afraid to take any action.

On the other side, the Jewish leaders didn't want to let the apostles keep on preaching in Jesus' name. If still more people began believing in Jesus, the leaders would gradually lose their own authority and influence over the people. When Peter and John were recalled, the leaders instructed them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John didn't accept the leaders' command about this. Jesus had given them an opposite command: "Go and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." So they told the leaders and the rulers they could not obey them, as they must obey God rather than men.

In other verses in the New Testament, believers are commanded to obey those in authority over us. But if those in authority oppose something that God Himself has commanded, then we must not obey them in this matter. We must always obey God over men. Even though Peter and John had defied the leaders, the rulers didn't have the courage to take any action against the apostles except to threaten them once more.

Peter in his sermons at the Temple made it quite plain that he and the other apostles had seen Jesus a number of times after He rose from death. There was no way that Caiaphas would convince Peter to say anything but the truth. It has been said, “A man with an argument is no match for a man with an experience.” When we experience Jesus’ touch on our lives, we can never forget it.

The thing the Jewish leaders feared the most was this preaching about Jesus being risen from the dead. If they could prove that Jesus hadn’t risen from the dead, then this new religion could quickly die out.

At this particular point in time, the number of people being added to the church daily was in the thousands. Whenever trouble and persecution came on Christians, their numbers usually grow more rapidly. Therefore let us even today, rejoice whenever we have the chance to suffer for Christ’s sake.

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter takes up a theme of suffering for being a Christian. Scholars believe that Peter wrote it while he was in Rome. It was written to encourage the believers in the churches in several Roman provinces, which were located in what we now know as modern Turkey.

Some of the believers there were suffering various kinds of trials and persecution. They seemed to be shocked and dismayed by the troubles that were coming on them. They had thought that after believing in Christ, they would receive blessing, joy and prosperity. But instead of experiencing these good things, they had difficulties.

God allows all kinds of trails to come on believers to test and strengthen their faith. Just as gold is refined by fire, so our faith is purified by trials. Because of our hope of eternal life, we are able to rejoice in these short trials because they’re not for our harm but for our good.

If, after we've been tested, our faith has proven to be genuine, we will receive at the appointed time Jesus' praise, glory and honour.

However, on the other hand, if our faith fails under the testing, we need to stop, examine ourselves and realign our beliefs, values and attitudes with the Bible's teachings. Satan will especially attack our faith. The Lord Jesus warned Simon Peter before His arrest that Jesus had prayed for Peter that his faith may not fail.

How should we handle threats against ourselves, our families and our possessions? In Revelation, Chapter 12, it says: "They [that's believers in Jesus] won the victory over him [that's Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the truth which they proclaimed, and they were willing to give up their lives and die."

These believers knew their lives belonged to God. They knew that as followers of Jesus during the tribulation period they experienced, they could lose their lives. They also knew their times were in God's hands. Thus, the believers spoke up for their faith in Christ and whatever the consequences were for doing so, they were ready to face them.

A story is told from the pages of Christian history about a believer who was brought before one of the Caesars. He was told to renounce his faith and give glory to Caesar. The man would not do it. So the emperor said to him, "Give up Christ, or I will banish you."

The Christian said, "You can't banish me from Christ, for God says, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" The emperor said, "I will confiscate your property."

The Christian replied, "My treasures are laid up in heaven. You can't touch them."

The emperor said, "I will kill you." The Christian answered, "I have been dead to this world in Christ for 40 years. My life is hidden with Christ in God. You can't touch it."

The emperor turned to some of the members of his court and said, in complete disgust, "What can you do with such a fanatic?" May God give us more Christians like this man!

Threats against us must be handled in such a way that God's name is glorified. Quoting Scripture is a good way to respond, as this man showed. By saying the Bible verses of God's truth, it made it hard for the aggressor to reply with anything meaningful. We must always remember that our lives belong to God. He's the one who decides the day of our birth and the hour of our death. One writer put it this way: "Until our Master summons us, not a moment of our life can be snatched from us."

God keeps very detailed records. There's a reward waiting for every believer. Even small things are recorded. The reward for followers of Jesus is that we will have our works follow us.

What kind of works will follow you? If you don't have any works in the Lord following you, then this raises the question of whether you are a true believer. Although works don't save us, they are good evidence that we are saved. The Bible in Ephesians, Chapter 2, says, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." At the same time, a faith that doesn't produce good works through Christ is a faith that is not working.

If you died today, would you die in the Lord and go to be with Him, or would you be separated from Him and His goodness? Are you trying to heap up many good deeds by yourself, hoping that they will get you into heaven when you die? Doing good works to earn salvation is a trap and a lie.

We need real, saving faith so that our works will follow us on that final day. Have you submitted your life to the Lord Jesus Christ? He will forgive you of all your sins if you ask Him to. Then you can know with certainty that when you die, your name is written in God's Book of Life. Your reservation is set and ready to meet the Lord. There's nothing more important in this life than making this decision.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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