

BILLY BREAKS THE RULES

It was a warm spring day and only two weeks were left until summer vacation. This year had been very eventful; the kids in my class were so bad that three teachers had quit.

I'll never forget when Miss Wilkes wore a white lacy dress to class only to have Ralph approach her with a fountain pen that he used to spray ink all over the front of her dress. She ran out of the class in tears but by the time she reached the principal's office she had no stain on her dress because Ralph had used invisible ink. Ralph ended up getting suspended for a week and Miss Wilkes never returned as our teacher.

I guess it's not an easy task to teach fifth graders, especially when you have people like Ralph in your class. Not that most of the boys in my class aren't bad, it's just that Ralph is the worst. He loves to tease us girls at recess but we've learned to put up with him, even though three teachers didn't. But the teacher we have now is different. All the boys really respect him including Ralph.

The first day he came, which was about two months ago, he had a real good talk with us. One of the things that he said was that he was going to let us make up some rules and also decide the punishment for breaking those rules. Well we certainly never had a teacher like this before. One of the things we decided on was that if any of the boys were caught stealing, he would have to get ten lashes across the back. Ralph came up with that one because he thought it sounded like how pirates would punish one of their thieves.

It wasn't long after this that one of the boys in my class discovered that someone had take a sandwich out of his lunch box. The next day my best friend Sarah had her chocolate chip cookies taken. It was then that we approached Mr. Rex our teacher about it.

Since I was the smallest person in my class, he chose me to hid in a closet with the door barely opened so I could spy on anyone tampering around with anyone's lunch box. I went in there during recess since Mr. Rex thought that was probably when one of our classmates was stealing; usually all the kids were outside playing during that time.

I had barely been in the closet for five minutes when a boy names Billy came in the room. He was looking all around him to make sure no one was around; then he opened a lunch box and took out a sandwich and an apple and put them into a paper bag. It seemed so strange to me that someone would be stealing food, but Billy was different from the other kids. He sort of kept to himself and he wore the same clothes every day.

As soon as he left the room I came out of the closet and went and told Mr. Rex what I had seen. He then went back to the room with me and had me point out which lunch box Billy had taken from and which bag he had put the food in. Then when recess was over he got the lunch box that I had seen Billy take from and he asked the class who owned it. Ralph raised his hand. Then Mr. Rex asked him to look in it and see if anything was missing. Then Mr. Rex took Billy's bag and asked Billy to open it. Of course Ralph's sandwich and apple were in it. I felt so sorry for Billy because he turned so red that even his ears turned red. Mr. Rex then asked Billy if he had taken those things and in a very low whisper he said, "Yes." You could tell he was really ashamed.

Mr. Rex then told Billy to take off his jacket and shirt so that he could get ten lashes with a belt. It was so strange that Billy had that jacket on because it was really warm outside

but whether it was hot or it was cold, Billy always had that jacket on. The kids would even kid him about always wearing it but he never was without it. Well when Mr. Rex asked him to take it off he said nothing, but he shook his head as to say no. Finally after much persuasion from Mr. Rex, Billy started to cry and said he couldn't take off his jacket. Mr. Rex then took Billy outside the classroom and after about five minutes they came back in. Mr. Rex explained that the reason Billy didn't want to take off his jacket was because he didn't have a shirt on underneath. And the reason that he was stealing food was because his family was so poor they couldn't afford to feed him properly so he needed the food because he was hungry. Then Mr. Rex explained that he and Billy had talked and that Billy knew that even though what he had done was understandable, it was still wrong and he was willing to take his punishment. It was then that Ralph stood up and said, "Mr. Rex, the rules say that the punishment for stealing is ten lashes across the back but the rules don't say who has to take the punishment. I want to take those ten lashes for Billy."

Mr. Rex was silent for a minute and then he said, "You're right Ralph, if you want to take his punishment you can."

Ralph then took off his shirt and Mr. Rex gave him ten lashes across the back. When Mr. Rex was done he turned around toward us and I could see tears in his eyes. He sat down for a few minutes and then he said, "I know that the government has decided that the classroom is not the place to be discussing religion but I feel in this situation I must and I hope that none of you mind."

"What Ralph has done for Billy reminds me of what took place on a cross two thousand years ago. We, like Billy, have broken the rules, only we have broken God's rules. And even though Billy deserved to be punished, Ralph took his punishment for him. And just like Billy, we deserve to be punished also; but someone else has already taken the punishment for us. You see when Jesus died on the cross. He was suffering the punishment that each one of us deserve. Jesus is God Himself and because He died for our sins, we can go to heaven as a free gift."

"A lot of people have the idea that if they live good lives and are sorry for the things that they do wrong that God will accept them into heaven. But the punishment for sin is death, which means going to hell. Jesus died on a cross because people are not able to pay for their own sins. The Bible says, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' The only thing that you have to do to go to heaven is to believe in Jesus Christ."

"To explain what it means to believe in Jesus, let me give you an example. Let's say you wanted to go to an island and there was a boat to get you there. Well you know that unless you were to put two feet into that boat, you'd never get to that island. Let's say that the island is heaven and the boat is Jesus. If you believe in Jesus to get you to heaven, it's like putting two feet in the boat, so you'd go to heaven. But if someone thought that it wasn't enough to believe in Jesus, but he thought he also had to be good, then he would be sticking one foot in the boat and leaving one on shore. And of course he couldn't make it that way. In order to go to heaven you have to realize that it is Jesus alone Who is going to get you there."

“Now once you’re on your way to heaven, God wants you to be good so that you can be His friend and He can reward you. When you believe in Jesus you become God’s child. The Lord deals with His children just like a good father does with his. He rewards them when they are good and He punishes them when they are bad, but He promises that He will never send any of His children to hell. The moment a person believes in Jesus he has everlasting life and is a permanent member of the family of God. The only people who will go to hell are the people who have never believed in Jesus.” Then Mr. Rex asked, “Does that make sense to everyone?” and we all shook our heads yes.

It was then that Ralph stood up and said, “Thank you for telling us that Mr. Rex.” And then everyone in the room started clapping. After a few minutes Ralph stood up again and said, ‘I’d like to make up a new rule. And that is that at lunch time we all share our lunches.’”

Mr. Rex said, “Alright, let’s take a vote on it. Everyone in favor raise you hands.”

Everyone raised their hands.

I had a feeling that not only would there be a lot of extra food at lunch time the next day, but that also that Billy would become the owner of some new shirts.

The next day five boys brought shirts for Billy. Ralph of course was one of them; he gave Billy three shirts. It’s funny how sometimes the worst kid can really prove to be the nicest kid down deep inside. I really like Ralph now even though he still teases me. He and Billy have become close friends. It seems right to me that you should be a friend to someone who did something so wonderful as to take your punishment for you. That’s why I’m studying the Bible and living for God, I want to be His friend because of what He’s done for me. Who wouldn’t want to be a friend of God’s?