

## Acts of the Apostles

### Acts 4:1-22

#### Lesson 9 – Peter and John before The Sanhedrin

**Acts 4:1-22 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup> The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. <sup>2</sup> They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup> They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. <sup>4</sup> But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand. <sup>5</sup> The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup> He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone'. <sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." <sup>13</sup> When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. <sup>15</sup> So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. <sup>16</sup> "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." <sup>18</sup> Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." <sup>21</sup> After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. <sup>22</sup> For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

### Discussion Questions

1. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is critical to the theology of the Christian. If there is no resurrection there is no hope for our resurrection, if there is no resurrection then Jesus is not at the right hand of God the Father and is not coming back to receive his bride the CHURCH.
  - Further explain in your own words why belief in the resurrection is so critical to you?
  - When witnessing and even talking among ourselves, the resurrection seems to be an afterthought and it not part of our regular conversation about Christianity, why is that?

- What are others response to the resurrection when you did speak about it?
  2. Read Verse 8 and 9. The context of this scripture has an undertone of there will be persecution for doing good and doing the will of God.
    - a. Name a time when it appears that you were being punished for doing good? How did you handle that? How did it change your prayer life? Did it make you apprehensive about continuing to do good?
  3. Verse 11 speaks about the “stone” man rejected is the stone that has become the foundation we build the church on. This “stone” is referencing Jesus. Speak to how this verse can be used to witness to people the world has cast aside and labeled good for nothing? What can you tell them about their uniqueness and God’s plan for their life?
  4. Christians are under heavy persecution around the world. People are being killed for their faith as Christians.
    - a. If someone was not a believer and challenged you by asking how can your God allow this to happen, what would your response be?
  5. Verse 22 makes a very specific point to add that the man was 40 years old. Too often we give up on people and speak about there being no hope for them because they are so set in their ways. Here is a man who became a believer after probably not believing that God cared about him or his situation for forty years.
    - a. How does this motivate you to not give up on those relatives/friends that you have said to yourselves are beyond saving.
  6. Discuss your major takeaways from the sermon/lesson for this week.

**Workshop:** Read verse 10. It speaks about the power and authority of the name Jesus. Speak among yourselves about the power in this name Jesus, what power and authority does that give you, what responsibly do you have to protect this name.

## **The First Persecution of the Church: Lessons for Christian Service, 4:1-22**

**(4:1-22) Introduction:** this is the first persecution of the church. There are several challenging lessons for Christian service clearly seen in the experience.

**1. (4:1) Persecution:** Peter and John were arrested and tried. They were arrested "as they spoke," that is, while they were preaching. Remember that the cripple had walked through the temple leaping and praising God (Acts 3:8-11). A huge throng of thousands had rushed to see the cripple who had been healed and to hear the message being proclaimed by the two men who had such power. The temple was a massive building which could hold thousands (Acts 4:5). (See Deeper Study #1, Temple—Matthew 21:12-16.) The excitement and noise were bound to attract the attention and bring the temple authorities to the scene. What they saw and heard disturbed them to no end. They thought they had eliminated the "Jesus movement" eight weeks earlier when they had crucified Jesus. They had heard about the preaching incident several days earlier and how excited the people had become (Acts 2:5f). Now these two men (Peter and John) were publicly preaching the rumor that God had raised Jesus from the dead. And they were preaching, of all places, in the temple precincts.

It was time to investigate the matter, to nip the movement in the bud before it could spread. Note those who came to arrest them. As mentioned above, they stopped Peter right in the middle of his message.

1. The priests were probably those who were officiating in the temple at that particular time.
2. The captain of the temple. (See Deeper Study #2, Temple Captain—Acts 4:1 for discussion.)
3. The Sadducees. (See Deeper Study #2—Acts 23:8 for discussion.)

**2. (4:2-4) Religionists— Persecution— Worldliness:** Peter and John suffered abuse because they preached the resurrection. The officials were threatened by the preaching of Jesus being raised from the dead. They knew that it was the nature of people to respond to hope, especially to great hope. They also knew that great excitement existed within the people's heart for the coming of the Messiah and that it would take only a small spark of hope to set the excitement aflame. They just could not allow *Jesus* to be preached, not the hope of His resurrection, for the resurrection meant that all men who followed Him would arise. People ached and were ripe for such a message. Therefore, the authorities, knowing the nature of man and the situation, were threatened. If the people turned to the *new movement*, the authorities...

- feared the loss of the people—their loyalty, recognition, and esteem.
- feared the loss of position, authority, and livelihood. If they lost the loyalty of the people or allowed a disturbance, the Romans would replace them with other officials. The Romans were usually tolerant, but they were quick to stamp out disorder and disloyalty.
- feared the people might begin to think that *their doctrine* was wrong. If they allowed the preaching of the resurrection to continue, they would be admitting that God had by-passed them and revealed the truth to *others*. Their own *spiritual condition* and beliefs and teachings would be suspect. They were the secure *religionists* and the official religious leaders. Therefore, they would be jeopardizing their own religion and leadership among the people. They would be undermining their own sense of security and their sense of being acceptable to God.
- feared acknowledging they were wrong in crucifying Jesus. If He were truly the risen Son of God, then they were sinners, chief sinners, guilty of denying and rejecting God's Son. (See note—' Matthew 12:10 and Deeper Study #1—Matthew 12:10 for more discussion as to why the religionists feared and opposed Christ and Christianity so much.)

**"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).**

**"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).**

**"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34).**

**Thought 1.** Note how the same fears strike so many today, causing them...

- not to support true men and movements of God.
- not to *rock the boat*.
- not to do what is right.

**Thought 2.** Too many seek after the things of the world and of religion instead of really serving God. They seek after...

- acceptance
- esteem
- recognition
- position
- authority
- power
- possessions
- wealth
- bigger and better

The authorities arrested Peter and John. It was late afternoon, too late for a trial, so they jailed them for the night. But note a significant fact: before Peter was arrested, he had shared enough of the gospel for the crowd to respond. Five thousand men (not counting women and children) made decisions for Christ.

Persecution did not stop the Word and the Spirit of God from working. Souls (fruit) were saved despite the abuse and opposition. What a lesson for believers to *keep on* in their preaching and witnessing no matter the opposition.

**"My Word shall not return to me void" (Isaiah 55:11).**

**"The Word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9).**

**3. (4:5-10) Jesus Christ, Power:** Peter and John credited Christ with the power to heal and to change lives. Note three points.

1. The Sanhedrin court convened the next morning to put Peter and John on trial. The term "rulers, elders, and scribes" means the Sanhedrin. It was the ruling body, both the governing council and supreme court of the Jews. (See Deeper Study #3, Sanhedrin—Acts 4:5-6.)

a. The term "rulers, and elders, and scribes" is apparently just a term of synonyms, a term used by the people when referring to the Sanhedrin.

⇒ Rulers would refer to the whole body.

⇒ Elders would refer to the most esteemed of the nation. The whole Sanhedrin was sometimes simply referred to as the *Elders*.

⇒ Scribes was a definite profession of men, the experts, the *doctors* of Jewish law and tradition.

Annas was apparently recognized as the High Priest by most Jews. He had actually been removed from power by the Romans, but he had been so influential among his peers that he was still recognized as the *power behind the throne*. (See note, pt. 6—[Luke 3:1](#); note—[John 18:12-14](#).)

⇒ Caiaphas was serving as High Priest in the eyes of the Romans (see note—[Matthew 26:3-5](#); [Deeper Study #2—Matthew 26:3](#)).

⇒ John is unknown. All we know is what is mentioned here, that he belonged to the high priestly family.

⇒ Alexander is also unknown, except that he too belonged to the high priestly family.

b. The question the court asked was straight to the point. "By what power, or by what name have you done this [healed the man]?" The court was doing exactly what God had said to do. God had instructed Israel to try every man who claimed to be a prophet and worked signs and wonders among the people ([Deut. 13:1-5](#)). If the man was not a true prophet, he was to be executed.

But there is more to their questioning than this. They knew Peter was preaching the resurrection through Jesus Christ. They had to stop it or risk losing the loyalty of the people and their position and livelihood, so they were seeking opportunity to accuse and stop Peter and John. (See note—[Acts 4:2-4](#).)

Their questioning may also involve something else. They were the religious leaders; therefore, they thought the power could not be of God. If God should choose to do some marvelous work, especially in the temple, they thought He would choose to reveal such to them, the traditional religious leaders. Therefore they felt the *name* and the *power* that healed the crippled must be diabolical ([Luke 11:15](#)).

**Thought 1.** Men in leadership, leaders in both state and religion, face some common sins, the seeking of...

- position
- influence
- recognition
- authority
- riches
- being exclusive

The flesh, sinful human nature is the culprit. But bureaucratic, institutional, established positions lend themselves to the sins.

**Thought 2.** Every believer and minister and group must guard against thinking that God can work only through them. God is always bringing new faces and groups into the picture to do His work. He must, for the mission is so enormous and there is still so much to do—so many who have not yet heard and been helped.

2. God equipped Peter and John with the Holy Spirit. Note how quickly God came to the rescue: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit." Peter had not even had time to speak, and God was present, filling Peter with the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit was ready to take over and give Peter the words to say.

**Thought 1.** The believer who is ready to proclaim Christ will never be left alone. The Holy Spirit will be present to speak through him.

**"And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:18-20).**

**"But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" (Mark 13:11).**

3. Peter and John credited Christ with the power to make men whole. Peter declared three critical points.

a. It was "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" that made the man whole. Note that Jesus is called the "Christ" (Messiah). Peter was declaring that men must know that Jesus is the true Messiah, and there must be no doubt which Jesus: it was the Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Messiah, the Savior whom God promised to send to the world.

Note the word "whole" (see Deeper Study #4—Acts 4:9-10). The man was made whole in both body and soul. Who did it? Who could heal the man in both body and soul? Peter declared unequivocally:

⇒ not himself, not John, nor any other man.

⇒ Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Jesus from Nazareth; He alone had made this man whole.

b. It was Jesus Christ (Messiah) whom ye crucified. Remember Peter was speaking to the top leaders of the nation. He charged them with killing not only a man, but the Messiah. What an indictment! To be charged with killing the Son of God Himself!

**Thought 1.** The indictment is charged against all men. All men are guilty of the death of Jesus Christ.

c. It was Jesus whom God raised from the dead that made the man whole. Peter was declaring that it was the power of the resurrected and ascended Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth who had such power. (See outlines

**4. (4:11-12) Jesus Christ, The Stone— Salvation:** Peter and John proclaimed salvation. Peter had just shared the source of his power, the name of Jesus Christ. He now proclaimed the salvation that is in Jesus. And to strike the point home, he used the declaration of prophetic Scripture.

1. Jesus Christ is the Head, that is, the Chief Cornerstone of God's building (cp. Psalm 118:22).

a. God gave man the *Head Cornerstone* for His building, the life He wanted man to build. But men set the stone "at nought," counted it as no good, unacceptable, of no account, of no worth. Men rejected God's Head Stone and went about finding their own chief stone and building their lives as they wished.

b. But God took His Stone, despite man's rejection, and still made Him the Head of the corner. God has exalted Jesus Christ and made Him the Head of life. (See Deeper Study #7—Matthew 21:42; Deeper Study #9—Matthew 21:44; and Deeper Study #10—Matthew 21:44.)

**"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner" (Acts 4:11).**

**"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" (Matthew 21:42).**

**"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephes. 2:20).**

**"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (1 Peter 2:6).**

2. Jesus Christ alone saves. There is no other Head, no other exalted Lord; therefore, no man can be saved...

- by any other head or lord.
- by any other name *under heaven*.

No teacher is capable enough, no prophet is noble enough, no minister is good enough to save himself, much less anyone else. Therefore, no matter the claim—no matter the indulgence and strength of the name—the man comes far, far short of being God's chosen Head. No man has the name by which God saves men. All men are mortal. No man can make another man immortal. Therefore God's Head, the name which God uses to save men, must be eternal; and only *One Man* is eternal: Jesus Christ the Son of Man Himself.

**"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).**

**"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).**

**5. (4:13-14) Jesus Christ, Fellowship With— Meditation:** Peter and John gave evidence that they had been with Jesus. Note a striking fact: it was the boldness and power of Peter and John that *caused* the rulers to recognize them. The rulers had witnessed the same boldness and power in Jesus. And now it was boldness and power that identified these two men as having been with Jesus.

Note another fact: the boldness and power were not due to education and learning. It was due to their having "been with Jesus." The clear evidence that a person has been with Jesus is *boldness and power*. The man made whole stood before the *Court of the World*. Therefore, the world was silenced. The enemies of Christ could not refute the claim, for the claim was not profession only. The claim was backed up by the evidence of a miracle, of a changed life: a man was made whole.

**Thought 1.** What a challenge to believers! We must *be with Jesus*; we must spend time, much time with Him. He is the source of boldness and power.

**Thought 2.** There is only one evidence that we belong to Jesus. Do we live in His boldness and power? If we have *been with Jesus*, then His boldness and power are present within us. We are living and witnessing in boldness and power.

**Thought 3.** What a change the world would know if believers spent enough time with Jesus to receive His boldness and power.

**"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).**

**"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37).**

**6. (4:15-18) Persecution:** Peter and John suffered threats. The court had Peter and John escorted from the council chambers so they could discuss the matter and reach a verdict.

⇒ They acknowledged that a "notable" (clear, unmistakable) miracle had been done. The man was *made whole*.

⇒ *All* the people knew the man had been transformed.

⇒ They could not deny the miracle. They would have; but the evidence (the power of Christ), the man made whole, stood before them. (Cp. Matthew 28:11-15.)

**Thought 1.** The great need of the hour is for *lame* men to be made whole, transformed by the power of Christ. When a man is truly transformed, the world *cannot deny* it. The power of Christ stands *within* them as evidence that He is the risen and exalted Lord.

The rulers knew they must stop the *new movement*, suppress it from spreading any further among the people (Acts 4:17). At this point, they did not dare take drastic steps lest the people cause a disturbance that would bring the Romans down upon them (cp. Acts 4:21). Their decision was to threaten Peter and John, forbidding them to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

Note this: the orders and decisions of the court were binding except in the death penalty (which had to be referred to the Romans). The court's orders had to be obeyed or else Peter and John would face severe consequences.

**"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11).**

**"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22).**

**"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God" (Phil. 1:28).**

**"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).**

**7. (4:19-20) Witnessing:** Peter and John refused to compromise their message. There are two all-important reasons.

1. God is to be obeyed before men. The highest authority must always be obeyed. This is the very basis of men and their laws. It is the word of the highest authority that men must carry out. Peter and John challenged the world: "Ye judge" (Acts 4:19). "[If it is] right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19).

Christ had commanded them to preach time and again (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21). They had to obey Him. They could do no other, for the highest possible authority had spoken. They were commissioned by God to speak and teach the resurrection, even in the face of opposition and persecution.

**Thought 1.** How can believers keep silent about Christ and His glorious salvation? He has commanded us to *speak* and *teach*, to bear witness and testimony to the living Lord.

2. A man must testify to what he has seen and heard. Note that the two disciples were claiming to have seen and heard Jesus after His resurrection as well as during His ministry.

**"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor. 4:13).**

**"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences....For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:11, 14).**

**"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).**

**8. (4:21-22) Conclusion:** the result of such a dynamic witness was that men glorified God (*edoxazon ton theon*); that is, they kept on gloryifying Him. Why? Because the power of Christ had taken a man who had been *helpless* for forty years and made him *whole*, completely whole.

**"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).**

**"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8).**

**"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).**

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