

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #11

Acts 4:1-22

There is a major movement in many places to try to entice people to come to church by a variety of ways. Some have gone to entertainment. Some have gone to a vaudeville act mentality. Some have gone to an emotionally feel-good type of presentation which tells people God loves them all. The problem with this mindset is that it isn't Biblical. In many passages of Scripture it is specifically said that the Gospel when accurately preached is an offense to people. For example, the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter specifically said the Gospel, centered on Jesus Christ, was "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (Romans 9:33; I Peter 2:8).

When Peter started proclaiming the Gospel in the Grace Age in Jerusalem, he did not start out by saying, "I want all of you to know God loves you just the way you are." He didn't start out by saying to the other apostles, "We need to figure out a method of preaching that can be relevant to the modern day city man of Jerusalem." He looked these men in the face and said, "By your wicked hands you have murdered the Son of God, your only Savior and Messiah."

As we saw last time he said "you delivered Him", "you disowned Him", and "you murdered Him" (Acts 3:13-15). Then he proceeded to tell them that **the only way they could be saved from their sin is by believing in the name of the One they just killed**. They could not save themselves; they were not good enough to go to heaven, and they needed a righteousness they did not have and could not earn. That righteousness could only be found in Jesus Christ who had been raised from the dead. That message offended many of those listening, and as a result they arrested Peter and John and put them in jail. What we see here is this:

EVER SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH, IT HAS BEEN REVEALED THAT IF WE ACCURATELY COMMUNICATE THE GOSPEL TRUTH ABOUT SIN AND ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, WE WILL BE AN OFFENSE TO MOST PEOPLE OF THE WORLD AND NOT POPULAR WITH MOST PEOPLE OF THE WORLD.

Preaching the truth about sin and Jesus Christ in Jerusalem caused the religious leaders to try to silence Peter and John. They did not want to hear the true Gospel and they wanted to shut them up. However, no matter what they did or said they could not stop them. There are five historical facts we want to observe:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Peter and John are arrested by religious leaders. **4:1-4**

The Sadducees were wealthy Jewish priests from the tribe of Levi, who saw themselves as a religious police force whose job it was to protect the traditions of Israel. They saw the Messiah as more of an ideal and not a person, and they rejected the idea of a resurrection (Luke 20:27-40).

When they heard that Peter and John were teaching that Jesus Christ was a fulfillment of Messianic prophecy and that He was raised from the dead and that one could only be saved through His name, they were "greatly disturbed" (**4:2**). This would certainly be a threat to them because it would draw attention away from them and that could affect their pocketbooks.

So they laid their hands on Peter and John and locked them up in jail for the night (4:3). They figured the way to shut them up is lock them up. However, according to **verse 4**, even though they were locked up, another 1000 had believed on Jesus Christ so the total number of believers in Jerusalem was now 5000 (2:41; 3:4).

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Peter and John appear before the religious leaders. **4:5-7**

I want you to notice how many leaders are opposed to Jesus Christ. In **verse 1** priests, captain of the temple guard, and Sadducees. In **verse 5** there are rulers, elders, and scribes. In **verse 6** you have Annas, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander.

The following day all the religious leaders are gathered together, Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander. We may recall that both Annas and Caiaphas both individually tried Jesus Christ and the rest of these very boys were on the council that would condemn Him (Luke.22:66). So Peter and John are standing before all these leaders who hate Jesus Christ and were responsible for killing Jesus Christ. These very men surrounded Peter and John and asked them by what authority or by what name or power did they do this - specifically heal that lame guy. **This must have been intimidating to look into the eyes of the same men who have the authority to kill you, just like they did Jesus Christ.**

The biggest opposition you will ever receive when you are setting forth truth will come from proud, arrogant religious people, especially religious leaders who aren't right with God.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – Peter addresses the religious leaders. **4:8-12**

Notice from **verse 8** that Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” and he addresses the religious leaders. Here is a message proclaimed that is due to the Holy Spirit. There are three observations we want to make:

Observation #1 - Peter acknowledges that these are religious leaders **4:8**

Most people think it is a sign of weakness to acknowledge someone else's position of authority. Actually it is an indication that one is in tune with the Holy Spirit. Usually, the matter comes down to a person's pride.

Peter is very respectful in the way he addresses these leaders. He will refuse to obey them, but he is respectful toward them. They are rulers and they are elders of the people and he acknowledges that. When one is in tune with the Holy Spirit, there will always be a proper respect for those who are in positions of authority; because one realizes God is a sovereign God, and He is the One who put them in their positions.

Someone once asked me why I always referred to Mr. Miles as Mr. Miles when I was such a close friend of his? Why didn't I call him John like so many others did? My response was, it is true I was his very close friend; but this is a mighty man who has been greatly used by God all over the world, and in the work of God, intimacy never replaces authority.

When Mary was the secretary/receptionist at GRBSM, every now and then some student would come in and ask to speak with John. Mary would say - "You address him as Mr. Miles, not John." That is what Peter does here, led by God's Spirit. He gives these leaders the respect they deserve as leaders.

Observation #2 - Peter specifically mentions the reason for this trial. **4:9**

Peter says the reason we are on trial here is because of a benefit done to a crippled man, and you want to know how this man was made well. Just think about that for a moment. They are on trial for doing something nice for a crippled man. Aren't you supposed to be on trial for doing bad things to people? These men are on trial because they were involved in doing something good for people.

Years ago in a church there was a young lady who had made some wrong choices in life. In the aftermath of making those choices, she really focused on her relationship with Jesus Christ and she dedicated herself to the things of God. Some ladies of the church wanted to do something nice for this girl and with some of the Pharisaical people it started a war. You would have thought that the church wanted to do something bad, when in fact it wanted to do something good.

That is exactly the situation here. Peter is before these Pharisees and says we are here on trial because something good has happened to this man, and we have been telling the truth as to how it happened.

Observation #3 - Peter specifically proclaims truth about Jesus Christ. **4:10-12**

Now Peter could have simply said God is the One who did these things, and ended it there. However, he specifically wants to focus his attention on Jesus Christ and he wants to take advantage of this opportunity to tell these boys the truth about Jesus Christ. I want you to observe that **verse 8** says that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. So what we see here is what true Holy Spirit teaching does and does not do. True Holy Spirit preaching does not draw attention to the Holy Spirit; it draws attention to Jesus Christ. There are six points he makes:

(Point #1) - Jesus Christ was the Nazarene . **4:10a**

These very leaders hated Galileans and put a sign above His head while on the cross identifying Him as One from Nazareth.

(Point #2) - Jesus Christ is the One you crucified . **4:10b**

The Greek is emphatic here. Peter is saying you are the very ones who killed Jesus Christ.

(Point #3) - Jesus Christ is the One God raised . **4:10c**

Now remember, he is addressing some here who do not believe in the resurrection and he is telling them, the One who healed this man before you is the One God raised from the dead, Jesus Christ. He hurls this truth at them as Kent Hughes said like “a flaming spear” (*Acts*, p. 62).

(Point #4) - Jesus Christ is the One responsible for this healing . **4:10d**

Peter says you want to know who is responsible for this crippled man standing here - Jesus Christ.

(Point #5) - Jesus Christ is the rejected Cornerstone . **4:11**

Peter says you rejected the only Cornerstone that can build you into a relationship with God. Everything in a relationship with God starts with Jesus Christ. You start building a relationship with God at the Cornerstone. This is the One you rejected.

(Point #6) - Jesus Christ is the only One who can save sinners. **4:12**

James Montgomery Boice said the world will fight you to the death on this point because there is nothing so offensive to proud, arrogant man than the fact he cannot save himself, but may only escape hell by the name of Jesus Christ.

Do you understand this point? Jesus Christ is the only name that can save a sinner. You cannot save yourself by your name. Church membership cannot save you. Your works cannot save you. No religion can save you. No religious person can save you. Salvation does not come by the name of Allah or Mohammed or Ayatollah. There is only one name that can save you and that is the name of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ or nothing. It is Jesus Christ or judgment. It is Jesus Christ or condemnation. It is Jesus Christ or hell. All you have to do to be saved is believe in His name to save you.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – The religious leaders order the apostles to stop preaching about the name of Jesus. **4:13-18**

These apostles baffled these religious leaders. According to **verse 13**, there was a confidence and power to their preaching and these leaders could not figure that out. So they dismissed them to talk things over. Those apostles were bold and confident and they spoke with power. But they were unschooled, that is they were not formally trained in any of their religious schools. They had been trained by Jesus Christ to the point that these leaders knew they had been with Him.

The problem here is that the leaders could not deny the miracle (**4:16**). The man who had been healed was standing right there in front of them and they could not deny it. Isn't that interesting, they admit they cannot deny the miracle. However, they can deny Jesus Christ. Some people say I would believe if I just saw a miracle. No, you wouldn't. You could have a miracle right before your very eyes and still arrogantly reject Jesus Christ exactly like this group.

Years ago there was a minister who preached a message on **Acts 4:14** and he entitled it “The Man Who Preached with His Feet.” They could not deny the evidence. That lame man had been crippled for over forty years (**Acts 4:22**) and he is standing and walking and jumping right before their very eyes. He is leaping in the Temple and all Jerusalem was talking about it (**4:16**).

Peter and John are telling everyone that there is only one Person with power to do this, and there is only one Person who can save from sin and that one is Jesus Christ. They either had to accept Jesus Christ or reject Jesus Christ because they are at a crossroad right now. These leaders were in a real dilemma.

They decided they would warn the apostles not to teach or preach any more about this name of Jesus. They would try to silence them and their message through threat. In other words, **they were about to make the preaching of the Gospel illegal. They were about to make the Gospel illegal because of one name.** So they called them back into the room (**verse 18**) and told them to stop preaching about the name of Jesus.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Peter and John refuse to stop preaching Jesus. **4:19-22**

When you are faced with a choice between the orders of civil government which contradicts the Word of God you have four options:

- 1) You can isolate yourself and never say a word. Hide your light under a bushel basket as a sniveling coward.
- 2) You can abandon the Word of God and submit to the government as a traitor.
- 3) You can try to play both sides together putting government and God at the same level as a politician.
- 4) You can defend the Word of God and refuse to submit to the government as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

Peter and John opted for the fourth option.

The Biblical principle of the ethics to follow this decision is this: we are to always obey those in authority over us unless that authority commands us to do something God forbids in His Word, or forbids us from doing something God commands in His Word.

Here is a major showdown in the Age of Grace between religious and civil authority and Biblical Christianity. It is an order to stop preaching the truth.

Peter says you are going to have to judge whether we are right before God to disobey you and keep preaching, but that is what we are going to do. We will not stop preaching.

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said the one thing you should not ever do is ask a man who is accurately preaching God’s Word to stop preaching, because that only makes him want to preach more (*Acts 4:1-31*, p. 7).

There is an amazing story in Church History about a circuit riding evangelist minister whose name was Peter Cartwright. He was known for shooting truth straight without compromise. One Sunday morning he was scheduled to speak in a place and President Andrew Jackson was in the congregation. So the leaders of the church advised Peter Cartwright to tone down his message in view of the fact that the President of the United States was at the service. History says that Peter Cartwright stood up and began by saying this: "I understand President Andrew Jackson is here. I have been requested to be guarded in my remarks. Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he does not repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." The audience was shocked and after the service the President of the United States went to the minister and said, "Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world."

Somehow in this politically correct world of ours we have been duped to believe that we should tone down the truth of the Word of God. God's Word and God's truth should never be toned down; it should be proclaimed as boldly as Peter and John. Jesus Christ is the only One who can save you from your sins; and in order to be saved, you must believe on Him.