

4. Peter and John before the Religious Leaders

Acts 4:1-14

After the lame man was healed, the priests, the temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. So they seized Peter and John and put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

The next day the high priest and other rulers met and had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "If you are asking about this act of kindness shown to a lame man, 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. For Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

So they strictly warned them not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus. Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to him? We must speak about what we've seen and heard (witnessed)."

INTRODUCTION: (Ask a pre-story question to discuss in pairs or as a group.)

- Have you ever been tempted to not tell the truth or to shift the events of what happened in order not to get in trouble? Talk to your neighbour about this story and why you acted the way you did?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

- **After the lame man was healed, who came to Peter and John. What were they upset about? Why do you think they were upset?**
- **What happened the next day? What did the religious leaders ask them? What can we learn from this?**
- **How did Peter respond to their question and to this persecution? Who empowered him to respond the way he does? What can we learn from this?**
- **How did Peter answer their question, “By what power or what name did you do this?”**
- **Peter said, “YOU crucified him, but GOD raised him from the dead.” What does this statement teach us?**
- **How can the story of Joseph help us understand Peter's words?**
- **What does Peter call Jesus? How does that relate to where the man was healed? What does he say about Jesus and salvation?**
- **What did the religious leaders notice about Peter and John? What did they recognize as the source of their confidence? What does this teach us?**
- **What prevented the leaders from arguing with Peter and John? So how did they try to handle the situation to make people not pay attention to Peter's message? Why do you think they did this?**
 - **How may church leaders today try to use fear to control or influence their people? How does this display their own fear?**
- **How did Peter and John respond to the leaders' order? What does this teach us?**
- **Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?**
 - **Be bold. Doing what is right in God's eyes.**
 - **Expect persecution or opposition. Trust the promise for God to be with us in the persecution.**
 - **Preach the Gospel.**
 - **Be witnesses.**
 - **Be saved.**
 - **Be with Jesus.**
 - **Rely on the Holy Spirit.**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- What are some steps we can take to promote clear and persuasive Biblical preaching and teaching in our churches?
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- What are some forms of persecution that believers in Christ face today? How can this story help us persevere under persecution? What does boldness look like in the lives of Christians?

Personal Application:

- What does boldness look like for you in evangelism? How could this story help encourage you to be more trusting in Jesus and not fear man?
- What is one situation where you are tempted to cling too much to the authority God has given you with your title or position and to care too much about what others think of you?
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- What is one step you can take this week to more fully “be with Jesus”?

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

- **After the lame man was healed, who came to Peter and John. What were they upset about? Why do you think they were upset?**
 - Peter and John were teaching the people about the resurrection of the dead in Jesus. This greatly disturbed the religious leaders and Sadducees.
 - This teaches us that the religious leaders wanted to be the only ones to teach others and didn't want others to have the authority to teach.
 - The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, so they think this is false teaching.
 - They were disturbed that thousands of people listening to and interested in Peter and John's teaching. Perhaps jealous and afraid to lose their power and authority.

- **What happened the next day? What did the religious leaders ask them? What can we learn from this?**
 - "By what power or what name did you do this?"
 - They were blind but they did not have a true understanding of the Old Testament that they taught. Shows us the ignorance of the leaders. They claimed to know everything in the scriptures but they did not recognize the Messiah when he came.
 - Arrogance. Protective of own authority to teach.
 - Fear. Feared losing their power. Feared the message of the apostles.

- **How did Peter respond to their question and to this persecution? Who empowered him to respond the way he does? What can we learn from this?**
 - He was filled with the Holy Spirit
 - We should be dependent on the Holy Spirit in our lives and also in the midst of persecution.
 - **Read Matthew 10:16-22** - When Peter remembered these words of Jesus, how would he have been encouraged?
 - Jesus tells them that they will be persecuted and brought before governors and leaders and that they are not to fear. Jesus tells them that what they will say will be given to them by the Holy Spirit. And they will be saved as they endure to the end.
 - Holy Spirit can help bring to mind the truths that we have learned and experienced.

- **How did Peter answer their question, "By what power or what name did you do this?"**
 - Pointed out that they were upset about an act of kindness.
 - Sin lies to us, denies the truth, tells us that good is bad and bad is good!
 - Gave credit to Jesus! This healing happened because of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who was crucified and raised from the dead.

- **Peter said, “YOU crucified him, but GOD raised him from the dead.” What does this statement teach us?**
 - He was bold, spoke the truth about their own sin and guilt.
 - This is part of the gospel.

- **What plan had the leaders had for Jesus? But what was God's plan?**
 - Though man did such an evil thing, God had a greater plan - a plan to raise Jesus up and provide salvation for sinners.

- **How can the story of Joseph help us understand Peter's words?**
 - Similar to Joseph who said, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid.” (Gen. 50: 20)
 - This is what Jesus did for us in his death and resurrection. What we (mankind) intended for evil by crucifying him or causing him to go to the cross on our behalf, God intended for good. Despite our sin against God, we do not need to fear because in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, we are saved.

- **What does Peter call Jesus? How does that relate to where the man was healed? What does he say about Jesus and salvation?**
 - He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become **the cornerstone**. Salvation is found in **no other name**, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”
 - (Also see Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; 1 Peter 2:6,7; Eph 2:20)
 - Ephesians 2:19-22 - *So then, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*
 - The man was healed at the Temple, which represents God's presence with sinful man. Jesus, by dying for our sins and being raised again, is the real foundation for anyone who calls on his name to be saved.
 - Salvation is exclusive. There is only one way - to trust in Jesus, the Savior who has been promised since the Garden of Eden.
 - People will claim someone can be saved in other ways or by other names but only in the name of Jesus Christ that we are saved.

- **What did the religious leaders notice about Peter and John? What did they recognize as the source of their confidence?**
 - The **boldness of Peter and John**, heard them speak with power and clarity, and were amazed that they were **uneducated, common men**. They were quoting and explaining Scripture, confident in their teaching.
 - They **had BEEN WITH Jesus**.

- Being with Jesus changes everything, even the religious leaders understood that being a disciple or apprentice to Jesus changed them.
 - **What does this teach us?**
 - God can use even ordinary, uneducated people.
 - “God doesn't call the qualified; he qualifies the called.”
 - Uses those who have been with Jesus, who have an intimate relationship with God through Christ. Those who humble themselves, trusting him.
 - But being with Jesus had provided them a true education of the Gospel and how the whole of Scriptures had been moving toward Christ.
- **What prevented the leaders from arguing with Peter and John? So how did they try to handle the situation to make people not pay attention to Peter's message? Why do you think they did this?**
 - The healed man was standing there in front of everyone!
 - They ordered them not to speak or teach anymore in the name of Jesus.
 - They feared their influence. Still resisting the Gospel.
- **How may church leaders today try to use fear to control or influence their people? How does this display their own fear?**
 - They fear to lose their own authority, their sense of ownership or control or favor.
 - threats to curse or to throw people out of their church
 - refuse to promote and develop other leaders, remove their opportunities for ministry for fear of them becoming more influential
 - threaten to cause division or mobilize others against you
- **How did Peter and John respond to the leaders' order? What does this teach us?**
 - They told them clearly and without fear that they had to obey God in everything, even if it meant disobeying the leaders.
 - They said, “We MUST speak about what we've seen and heard.” After the seeing the wonder of Jesus' death and resurrection, they had to testify to others.
 - Peter and John feared and trusted God. They knew who provided real life. Men could take their physical lives, but God was the one to save their soul.
- **Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?**
 - **Be bold.** Doing **what is right** in God's eyes.
 - **Expect persecution or opposition.** There will always be opposition in the world against the Gospel and the rightly taught Word of God. Those in

power often do not want their power to be challenged. We see that the early church had to deal with people who feared fellow men and loved their power and position more than the fear of God. But God empowers his people with his message. The Holy Spirit enables them to endure persecution and stand up for Christ.

- **Trust the promise for God to be with us in the persecution.**
- **Preach the Gospel.** Peter declared the plain truth about Jesus' death and especially his resurrection and the need for all people to repent of their sins and trust in him. Clear Gospel teaching.
- **Be witnesses.** Peter and John said they MUST tell others about Jesus. They were obeying Jesus' commands to be his witnesses.
- **Be saved.** People need to be saved through Jesus because "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
- **Be with Jesus.** Peter and John had been with Jesus, and it changed them. We also need to seek to be with Jesus in prayer and Bible study in order that he continues to change us.
- **Rely on the Holy Spirit.**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

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- **What is one situation where you are tempted to cling too much to the authority God has given you with your title or position and to care too much about what others think of you?**
- **What is one step you can take this week to more fully "be with Jesus"?**