

The Powerful Gospel and Powerful Unbelief (Acts 4:1-22)

I. The Gospel Grows in Spite of Persecution (1-4)

A. The Religious Rulers Appear to Silence the Apostles (1-2)

1. The Temple Officials Interrupt the Apostle's Preaching (1)
 - a. Notice the text says, "as they spake" – evidently John (and maybe even the healed man) were speaking as well as Peter
 - b. Luke lists three types of Officials who confronted them
 - i. The priests – those responsible for the Temple, sacrifices, rituals, and festivals
 - ii. The Captain of the Temple – 2nd in command to the high priest. In charge of Temple affairs and head of the Temple guard. He kept order
 - iii. The Sadducees – The aristocracy of Jerusalem. Members of the elite priestly families. Many were members of the Sanhedrin (the council)
2. The Temple Officials Wanted To Stop the Preaching (2)
 - a. The Apostles were Teaching Without Authorization
 - b. They were proclaiming Jesus being raised from the dead
 - i. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection
 - ii. Most other Jews believed in a general resurrection at the end of time but not a person being resurrected from the dead presently
 - c. They were Teaching "In the Name" of Jesus
 - i. The Rulers thought they had stopped this when they killed Jesus
 - ii. The Rulers were offended that they taught in His authority rather than coming to theirs

B. The Religious Rulers Arrest the Apostles (3)

1. This Represents the First Persecution of the Church
2. The Apostles were Arrested and held till the next day
 - a. Jewish law required that trials could not be held at night (although they broke this rule at Jesus' trial)
 - b. They held them because the day was ending
 - i. Remember that the lame man was healed around 3pm when Peter went to the Temple for the hour of prayer
 - ii. This means Peter's sermon lasted for several hours

C. The Gospel Continues to Grow In Spite of Arrest (4)

1. The Word the people heard was the Gospel of Jesus – many believed it and were saved as they preached
2. The number of men who believed was about 5000

- a. Its hard to know if this includes all those who had believed up to this point or those who believed in the crowd that day
 - b. I believe it was the men in that crowd – which would bring the total number of the church to somewhere between 8-15 thousand (5000 here includes only the men)
 - 3. The Point of the numbering is not to tell us exactly how many people there were – but to show that even in the face of arrest and persecution, the gospel was not hindered in doing its work.
- II. The Gospel Confronts the Religious Rulers (5-16)
 - A. The Rulers Question the Apostles' Authority (5-7)
 - 1. The Sanhedrin Gathers To Hear the Case (5)
 - a. The Sanhedrin was the highest Court in Jerusalem
 - i. Although they could not overrule the Roman officials, the court decided all internal matters of Jewish life
 - ii. The Court was made up of 71 people. 70 members and the High Priest
 - b. The Sanhedrin was made up of three classes
 - i. Rulers – the leading representatives of the high priestly class (the names in v. 6 probably list members of this class.
 - ii. Elders – Senior officials. Members of the Jewish Elite. They would include both priests and laymen. Probably rich and influential men.
 - iii. Scribes – Specialist in the law. Scholars. Some would have belonged to the Pharisees and others to the Sadducees.
 - 2. Luke Includes Specific People Present (6)
 - a. Annas – The Former High Priest. He was High Priest from 6 – 15 A.D. He was the first High Priest appointed by Roman governors. He was the High Priest at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry (Luke 3:2). He still had great influence in the society – so much that he even interrogated Jesus personally before he was brought to the council (John 18:13)
 - b. Caiaphas – Son in law of Annas. He was High Priests during Jesus' trial, the interrogation of the Apostles, and the stoning of Stephen. He was appointed High Priest by the Roman governor Valerius Gratus in 15 A.D. Caiaphas held office for 18 years.
 - c. John – possibly Jonathan another son of Annas. He became High Priest after Caiaphas (36 – 37 A.D.) – At this time he was probably the Captain of the Temple.
 - d. Alexander – nothing is known about him

3. The Sanhedrin Ask About Power and Authority (7)

- a. They want to know by what Power
 - i. There was no doubt that something supernatural had taken place – they couldn't deny the healing miracle
 - ii. The only two options were that it was from God or from Satan – this is the same dilemma they faced in Matt. 12. Jesus performed a healing miracle and they accused Him of doing it by the power of Beelzebub.
- b. They want to know by what Authority
 - i. Asking “in who's name” means by what authority do you come teaching and doing miracles
 - ii. These were uneducated fishermen, the highly learned and religiously trained Sanhedrin would have looked down upon them as being ignorant of the things of God.

B. Peter Addresses the Sanhedrin with Spiritual Boldness (8-9)

1. Peter is Empowered By the Spirit (8)

- a. Remember that just a few months earlier, Jesus had stood in this same position and the result was His execution.
- b. No doubt, this fact was on everyone's mind – including the Apostles. As far as they were concerned, they could very well be facing their death if they did not answer correctly
- c. In this moment, Peter is empowered and strengthened by the Holy Spirit of God to preach the gospel to the religious elite.
 - i. Matt. 10:19 – “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.”

2. Peter Points Out The Unjust Examination (9)

- a. Before Peter answers their question, he makes sure they know that they have arrested and interrogated them for a “good deed”
- b. From a strictly religious perspective, Peter and John should be thanked for making a lame man whole. Instead the Temple rulers see this as a challenge to their authority and their rule.
- c. Peter subtly points out their evil motives and their irrational actions in arresting them.

C. Peter Preaches the Gospel to the Rulers (10-12)

1. Peter Accuses the Rulers of Murdering the Messiah (10a)

- a. Peter doesn't just say that the miracle came through Jesus' name – He uses this opportunity to preach the same gospel to these rulers that he preached twice before in Acts.
 - b. Once again, Peter makes it personal – He says Jesus' name healed the man but also adds "whom ye crucified."
 - i. Peter did not hesitate to accuse these powerful men of the crime of killing God's Messiah
 - ii. These were indeed the same men who had illegally tried Jesus at night and turned Him over to Pilate to be crucified
 - iii. Twice before Peter has made this accusation to crowds of Jews. Both times, the result of the gospel was conversions and repentance. How will these powerful religious men respond?
- 2. Peter Announces God's Approval of Jesus (10b)
 - a. Peter draws a contrast between God's approval and their rejection of Jesus
 - b. They crucified Jesus – but God raised Him from the Dead
 - c. It is as if He is saying – you refused to submit to whom God has anointed as the Messiah – You have denied and disobeyed God
- 3. Peter Proclaims that Jesus Healed the Man (10c)
 - a. It is by the name of this crucified Messiah that the lame man can walk
 - b. He also stood with Peter and John in the council and the evidence was incontrovertible that the one whom they murdered months earlier still had power and authority to heal.
- 4. Peter Declares Jesus as The Fulfillment of Prophecy (11)
 - a. Peter quotes Psalm 118:22 and applies it to Jesus and the religious leaders' rejection of Him
 - i. NOTE: It is interesting that after saying the rejected stone has become the cornerstone in Ps. 118, the Psalmist then says, "this is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." – So that saying ("this is the day") speaks of the day of Jesus. (which is every day for the saved)
 - b. Peter, and uneducated and ignorant fisherman, quotes the Old Testament to show these religious leaders how their own sin has fulfilled God's Word.
 - c. Understanding this, the rulers should be convicted and pricked in their heart, just like the other crowds to whom Peter preached. Will they be?

5. Peter Declares Jesus is God's Only Salvation (12)
 - a. The Purpose of the Priests and Religious officials was to represent men before God – of course they no longer did this.
 - b. Peter declares that there is no salvation for man except through Jesus of Nazareth
 - i. The Religious Leaders could not depend on their tradition, their position, the Temple, or the animal sacrifices to make them right before God.
 - ii. They had killed the only salvation God offers
 - iii. The only option they have now is to repent and turn to Christ.

D. The Rulers Persist In Sinful Unbelief (13-16)

1. The Rulers Are Astonished at the Apostles (13a)
 - a. The leaders were rightfully amazed that these unlearned men were so bold and powerful in the preaching of Jesus
 - b. They could not help but be struck by Peter's use of the Old Testament Scripture to illustrate their error
2. The Rulers Recognized They Had Been with Jesus (13b)
 - a. They knew that these men were part of the disciples that followed Him in His earthly ministry
 - b. More than that, they knew that the only source of authority these men possessed was that they had been with Jesus
 - i. That is where their boldness comes from
 - ii. That is where their power comes from
 - iii. That is where their truth comes from
3. The Rulers Could Not Deny Peter's Answer (14)
 - a. The healed man was standing right there so they couldn't really deny what Peter said
 - b. They had no refutation from Scripture or otherwise that could nullify the truth that Peter has proclaimed to them
 - i. We don't always have to have the smartest answer or the strongest argument
 - ii. People just have to know that we have been with Jesus
 - iii. We speak the truth in love and let God handle the changing of hearts
4. The Rulers Could Not Deny the Miracle (15-16)
 - a. They sent the Apostles out and discussed what to do
 - b. Everyone in Jerusalem had heard about the miracle by now and there was no way to discredit it
 - c. NOTICE: the level of their unbelief. They understood completely that the miracle had happened and was real.

They understood that Jesus name is the power by which it happened, and they knew they couldn't hide it from the people. But they still wanted to squash the preaching because they would rather hold onto their own position than follow God.

III. The Apostles Refuse To Stop Preaching the Gospel (17-22)

A. The Rulers Command the Apostles to Cease (17-18)

1. All they cared about was stopping the spread of the teaching
2. It didn't matter if it was true or not
3. They threatened the Apostles not to ever speak in Jesus' name again.

B. The Apostles Refuse to Disobey God (19-20)

1. Notice Peter's response:

- a. He tells them plainly that they are asking Him to disobey God
- b. He tells them plainly that God is speaking through Jesus' name
- c. These men are the "judges" of Israel – so he gives them a dilemma. He tells them they should judge whether or not they should obey God or obey them!
- d. Peter's statement implies that they are disobeying God and commanding others to disobey God

2. Notice Peter's Refusal:

- a. Peter and John say that they cannot (are not able) to keep from speaking about what they have seen and heard
- b. Notice that he doesn't say they will keep teaching their theology or their viewpoint. He tells them that they have actually seen and heard these things
 - i. It is not just a belief system
 - ii. It is an experience with the Person of Jesus
 - iii. We are to tell of our experience with Him

C. The Apostles Are Released For Fear of the Crowd (21-22)

1. They threaten Peter again

- a. It didn't matter if it was true or if they were from God
- b. They wanted their leadership and position rather than truth

2. The people were excited and amazed that God had worked through the preaching of Jesus

- a. The leaders feared the people more than God
- b. The leaders didn't want the people to rebel against their rule or authority

3. Luke adds that this man was over 40 years old.

- a. 40 year olds don't suddenly get better after being crippled since birth

- b. This miracle was undeniable by everyone involved on every side.