
Peter & John before the Sanhedrin

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 12th July

Revelation 22:12-17 Acts 4:1-22

Part 5 in Acts series



From our reading in Revelation I simply note 3 things.

- The centrality of Jesus in God's saving work.
- That Jesus makes us ready to enter that final destination where life is fully realised.
- The voice of the Spirit and the Bride, that is the church, says come, everyone who hears says come. Come and take the gift of the water of life.

As we look together at Ch 4 in Acts, how ironic it is then when those charged with being faithful to God, in this case the most powerful religious group in the temple, are not just failing to give the invitation, they are trying to silence the gospel.

Let's pray, Lord Jesus, the Spirit and the church say come. Those who have heard say come. Come to the source of living water, given freely and without cost. May it be that this day we are refreshed anew as we open and sit under your Word, amen.

OK, so as we pick up the story where we left it last time, Peter is potentially 3 hours into his message following the healing of the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Through chapter 2 and 3 I've been emphasising that when the Word of God is at work, and the Spirit of God is at work, and the people of God are at work, things are going happen, good things.

But, now as we come to ch 4 we begin to see that when the Gospel is having an effect, there will be opposition. The enemy of souls, Satan, will be at work also.

So we pick up a story in 4:1 "While Peter and John was speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is resurrection from the dead."

Now we can not underestimate the threat here. Those who are "much annoyed" are the same ones who conspired to have Jesus killed just a month or two before.

Those that are seeking to shut down the proclamation of Peter and John are largely made up by a group called the Sadducees. A group who believed neither in life after death, or the supernatural.

None too surprising then that they came to Peter and John "much annoyed" because they are proclaiming that in Jesus there is resurrection of the dead. And their proclamation was facilitated on the basis of a supernatural healing.

Vs 3, so they, that is the powers that be, arrested them and put them in custody until the next day for it was already evening.

A word of encouragement. You can silence the speaker, but the Word, the Gospel has been proclaimed. Locking John and Peter up will not stop the Word or work of God.

Vs 4, but many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of believers now numbered about 5000. That's 5000 men which would make the actual number of much larger.

It's been estimated that the church could well be 15,000 strong now. Some have estimate much more. I'm speculating that for each man there would be a woman and perhaps a couple children.

However you count it, it's a huge influx from the That's up 120 which may have been only a matter of days ago. Day by day the Lord has indeed added to the number those who are being saved. No wonder the Sadducees are "much annoyed." They are probably "much worried" as well.

This is a politically appointed group of religious leaders answering to the Roman governor. The Romans did not take kindly to things upsetting the order in the city. Further, they were very invested in the Temple and the system not being undermined in any way.

Bear in mind that Jesus had already prophetically signalled the end of the Temple. That's what the cursing of the fig tree was all about. Just as the fig tree was not even showing the precursor to fruit, the bud, so too the Temple was far from proving productive.

That's aside from the fact the Temple would soon be obsolete as Jesus became the once for all sacrifice and the Church would become the new and living Temple.

However, at this stage in the churches life the believers are meeting in both homes and Temple. When Luke actually wrote Acts, the Temple had been already destroyed by the Romans and the Sadducees were no more.

Verse 5-6 the next day, their rulers elders and scribes assembled in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander and all who were of the high Priestley family.

This is the Sanhedrin, the council of 70-71 mostly made up of Sadducees. The group that had interrogated and condemned Jesus as worthy of death, and orchestrated the crowds to cry for his crucifixion and have a condemned terrorist and murderer released.

Vs 7, when they had made the prisoners stand in their midst they enquired "by what power, or by what name did you do this?"

We have seen that thus far Peter has been unwavering in his proclamation of Jesus. At Pentecost in Ch 2 he preached powerfully and uncompromisingly calling for repentance and offering forgiveness.

In Ch3 he healed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And then as the crowd looked in astonishment, he deflected the attention away from himself, and towards Jesus. "It is through the name of Jesus and faith in that name that has given this man perfect health." He then went on again to preach and proclaim the Gospel with the effect of many more thousands

believing in Jesus. Now Peter is really under the magnifying glass. Under integration will Peter stand strong? How will he answer the question of the Sanhedrin?

Before we look at Peter's answer, let's pause and think about the healed man for a moment. We don't know if he was arrested and spent the night in jail. We don't know if he was summoned by the council. I like watching court dramas on TV. I've learnt this, the prosecution does not like to introduce material that is helpful for the defence.

It would certainly help Peter and John's defence of the Gospel if they were able to point to the healed man and say, "you might not like our message about the resurrection of Jesus, but you can't deny the power of it." "Look at the evidence. Look to the facts.

From the text we don't know exactly why the healed man was there. As a prisoner? By summons? Of his own free will? All we know is that he was standing there as Peter and John are being interrogated.

Let's think about that for a moment. Yesterday his life was transformed. For the first time in his life he literally could have run away to avoid trouble. He didn't. His life had been transformed. It looks like he was prepared to stand in his new status whatever the cost.

Back to Peter and John. "By what power, or in who's name did you do this?" Vs 8, then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them.....

Another pause. I noted, when we looked at the healing of the lame man, that you would really want to know that you were hearing from God before you walked up to someone lame from birth, and said, "in the Jesus Christ of Nazareth's stand up and walk." Then you take them by the hand and pull him to his feet.

Now the stakes are significantly higher. They might not just lose face. They might well lose their heads if this powerful group engineered their death. As they had the death of Jesus.

Vs 8-10 "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said to them, rulers of the people, and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick, and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Clear as a bell. No compromise. If Peter had stopped there, it would've been challenging enough. But he didn't stop.

“this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
whom you crucified,”
“whom God raised from the dead,”
“this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders. It has become the cornerstone.”

Deeper and deeper into the truth Peter digs. No matter the cost.

Vs 12, “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

To a group who pride themselves in their status in the Temple and their status before man and God, Peter says you have it completely wrong. You have rejected and killed the very one your scriptures point to as the centre and basis of God’s saving work.

And here we come I think, to probably the greatest challenge of the gospel. Not just for the religious and political elite of the day, but down through history.

I believe it would be true to say that if I was to go out onto the street or drop into a cafe with a survey asking which do you find more offensive or disagreeable? The thought that you are a sinner needing forgiveness. Or the thought that there is salvation in no one else other than Jesus.

I could pretty much guarantee that salvation, exclusively in and through the name of Jesus Christ, is what the majority of people would find most offensive and disagreeable.

- What about those who haven’t heard?
- What are those who are raised up in a different religious tradition and the best of their ability and in integrity seek to follow that belief system?
- Surely a God of love would make allowances.

Maybe if we were looking just at vs 12 we could look a little deeper.

I simply say that Peter’s statement is in complete keeping with Jesus teaching, and indeed the teaching of scripture as whole.

Vs 13-16, “now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realised that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognise them as companions of Jesus.”

“When they saw the man who had been healed standing beside them they had nothing to say in opposition. So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another.” “They said what will we do

with them? For is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them, we cannot deny it.”

It is clear in our passage why Peter and John were so bold.

- Firstly Vs 8, it was the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Secondly, vs 13, these men were companions of Jesus.
- Thirdly, vs 16, that Jesus was working was beyond denying.

How to shut down these troublesome apostles.

Again you can try to silence the speaker. But you can't stop the Gospel once it begins its work in the mind and heart of the hearer. Even as Peter and John are carted off to jail thousands more commit their lives to Christ.

Verse 17-18 “but to keep it from spreading further among the people let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name so they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

How does opposition most usually show itself? In the first instance by attempting to silence us. If salvation is found only in Jesus then people need to hear that clearly, coherently, compellingly.

Romans 10:13-14, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

“Speak no more in the name of Jesus” That’s the order given by the same group that not so long ago had Jesus murdered.

Vs 19, but Peter and John answered them, “whether it is right in God sight to listen to you, rather than God, you must judge, for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.” “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

These companions of Jesus knew both the truth, and power of God. There was no alternate power that would silence their witness. Whatever the cost. Oh for such voices in our churches today. Oh for such voices in our communities. Where there is a clear and bold proclamation of the gospel God will work and people will come to faith.

I guarantee we would not be worrying about the financial viability of our parish if the Word of God working, the Spirit of God was working and the people of God was working.

Yes there would be opposition. But God is sovereign. I so love the fact that the Spirits response to the attack of Satan through the Sadducees and assorted leaders, was to work in the hearts and minds of several thousand onlookers, who hear the gospel and turn to Christ.

Vs 21-22, after threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened, for the man on whom the sign of healing had been performed was more than 40 years old.

There is an amount on encouragement we can take in the fact that that the Temple leadership were wary of upsetting the people. One thing I have noted in 30 or so years of ordained ministry. It is often the lay folk who keep things on track. I have been to many SYNODs over the years and it is often the lay people who reign in church leadership that play loose and fast with the Gospel.

Peter and John may have not been trained in the rhetoric and elegance of the political elite. They may have been written off as ordinary and uneducated men. But any who have been with Jesus and are full of the Holy Spirit are not to be underestimated. As far as the charge of being uneducated, I would just note both John and Peters contribution to the NT. John gives us arguably the most profound Gospel as well as letters and the book of Revelation. Mark was written based on Peter's sermons, and Marks Gospel became the basis of Luke and Matthews gospel.

And for our own day. Don't discount those who spend time with Jesus and are full of the Holy Spirit. And especially so if they are well versed in the scriptures as Peter and a John so evidently were.

To close. As far as opposition, or dealing it's that which would seek to silence the gospel, it's hard to argue against facts.

The Sanhedrin did not like what they were hearing. But they could not deny the fact of what they were seeing. A man lame from birth was standing before them.

I'm a great fan of people asking questions when it comes to the things of faith. Sometimes we may have answers. Sometimes not. Always though we will have facts.

- The fact of Jesus death.
- The fact of Jesus resurrection.
- The fact of what happened on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came.

- The fact of what happened day by day as God added to the church those who were being saved.
- The fact that despite opposition the Gospel could not be silenced.
- The fact of thousands of people turned to Christ as the gospel was preached authentically, boldly faithfully.
- The fact that the church is still growing today, and nothing can stop that, because it is God's church, not ours.

Let's Pray, Living Lord grow your kingdom in us, and your Church in this community, amen.