

Acts

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

There Is Salvation In No One Else

October 9th, 2022

Acts 4:1-22

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Introduction:

Good morning! Happy Thanksgiving! I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 4.

Our passage this morning is really the second half of the story that we considered last Sunday, which means that we need to begin with a very quick reorientation. Peter and John were on their way to the temple for their daily prayers when they encountered a man who had been born lame. He asked them for money, but instead, he received a new life! In the powerful name of Jesus, they told him to stand up and walk, and he leapt with them into the temple – praising God every step of the way!

This sign drew a crowd, and Peter took that opportunity to preach. Standing in the outer courts of the temple in the heart of Jerusalem, Peter announced that Jesus was everything that his Jewish brothers and sisters had been waiting for! He called them to repentance. He invited them to believe.

In summary, the lame man is dancing, Peter is preaching, and the crowd is repenting and believing! Our text this morning picks up in the middle of that scene where we discover that the religious leaders in the temple are fuming. Look with at Acts 4, beginning in verse 1. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” ²¹ And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened.²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. (Acts 4:1-22 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

There is a lot that we could say about our passage for this morning, but I would like to zoom in on one theme in particular: In this story, we catch an honest glimpse into the challenges of gospel ministry in a hostile world.

Gospel Ministry In A Hostile World

If you are a Christian, then you have been called to minister in a hostile world. You have been given an assignment. If we don't see that – if we don't BELIEVE that – then our time together this morning will be wasted. We are not considering this story in Acts 4 so that we can add some nice little notes into the margins of our Bibles. We are studying this story *so as to be changed!* Amen?

Peter and John have just been caught preaching the Gospel in the Jewish temple. The leaders of the temple were the *masterminds* behind the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. At the time that this sermon was preached, there was no place on the PLANET that was more hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ than the temple in Jerusalem!

But here they are! In the face of danger, and at the risk of their lives, they are telling anyone and everyone who will listen that Jesus Christ has come to save the world! This passage is a beautiful example of gospel ministry in a hostile world – the kind of ministry that each and every one of us has been called to. So, let's pull out some lessons from the example that we find here. Let's study this story so as to be *changed*.

First, as we minister in a hostile world, this story reminds us that:

1. The Gospel will be opposed

If Peter and John had stood silently next to this healed man, then the world would have left them alone. There's nothing offensive about charity, and so long as you go about your charitable work silently, you'll be applauded. Silent Christians are safe Christians.

But when charity is accompanied with the announcement of the gospel – when our acts are inseparable from our words – we should expect hostility. That's what we see here. Don't expect to receive a pass from persecution for being nice. There is not enough charity in the world to take away the offence of the gospel. As William Plumer observes:

No public service, no piety, no benevolence, no humility can exempt God's servants from ill will and wrong doing in this wicked world. David had his foes... Christ had his murderers.¹

¹ William S. Plumer, *Psalms* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 2016), 503.

Why is it that we are so often caught off guard by opposition? Why do we convince ourselves that if we're simply nice enough, the world will give us a pass? Listen: The world has NEVER seen a better person than Jesus. No one has EVER done the good works that he did. But his good works and his kindness were all but forgotten when he told the world the truth about sin. He was beaten and crucified while onlookers laughed and cheered. And his call to us is to follow him:

If anyone would come after me, **let him deny himself and take up his cross** daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (Luke 9:23-24 ESV)

Crosses are heavy. And uncomfortable. And unsafe. Why is it then that, when following Jesus feels particularly hard, we so often slip into a crisis of faith? “What is happening, Lord? Are you even REAL? Have I lost Your blessing? The world is being MEAN to me!” Peter – the same Peter who is arrested in our passage this morning – went on to write later in his life:

Beloved, **do not be surprised** at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12 ESV)

There is a spiritual enemy who hates God. And the devil hates you too. He hates your family; he hates your neighbors, and he hates your coworkers. If he hears you speaking gospel truth into his echo chamber of lies – if he sees you shining the light of Jesus Christ in the darkness – if he hears the rattling of the chains of sin and death beginning to break – he will NOT SIT IDLY BY!

That's what we see here. There was a great spiritual victory in this story! Many people came to Christ! Many who were spiritually dead were brought to life! This was an undeniable GOSPEL VICTORY!

But this story also includes a night in prison. The next day, Peter and John stood before 70 members of the Sanhedrin – the most powerful, educated, intimidating men in the city – and they were scrutinized and threatened.

That's gospel ministry in a hostile world. Miraculous healings and public arrests. Powerful sermons and murmured threats. As we engage with our assignment – as we minister in a hostile world – the gospel will be opposed. But, thankfully, we also learn in this story that:

2. The Gospel will NOT be restrained

Peter and John were pulled out of prison and brought before the Sanhedrin. As I mentioned earlier, the Sanhedrin was made up of the 70 most educated, powerful and influential men in Jerusalem. Luke mentions that this group included Caiaphas – the man who orchestrated the crucifixion. The previous high priest, the present high priest and the future high priest were all represented in this group – a group that was predominantly Sadducean. The Sadducees were the rational, practical, political wing of Judaism. They denied the resurrection and the supernatural, and they were outright annoyed by the scene that Peter and John had caused. They were annoyed that these men had the audacity to suggest that Jesus had been resurrected – the Jesus who had they had just recently silenced once and for all! As Lloyd-Jones notes:

The gospel is annoying to the natural man and makes him hate it because it proposes a way to him that seems to him to be utterly contemptible and ridiculous.²

“God become man? A sacrifice for my sins? How terribly annoying. Enough with the fairy tales.”

As an aside, I want you to notice that the devil always works from the same playbook. And one of his go-to plays is intellectual intimidation. Our teens feel it in their high schools and universities. We feel it online and in the workplace. The “educated” men – the “rational,” “enlightened” men – speak with unquestionable confidence! They can tell you exactly how old the earth is, and how it came into existence. They can explain away the resurrection and extemporize about how religion is the “opium of the masses.” Certain. Convinced. Annoyed by your gullibility and ignorance.

And it's intimidating, isn't it?

But even the smartest man on the planet knows a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of all that there is to know. There is a reason why we say, “The more you learn, the more you know that you don't

² Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 137.

know.” A truly intelligent man is a humble man. So, when the world laughs in your face for questioning their certainties, remember that their confidence is unfounded. And remember that the devil is up to his old tricks. He’s trying that tactic here, but Peter and John won’t be intimidated. Look again at verses 18-20:

¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:18-20 ESV)

There has been an awful lot of discussion over the last two years about when the church is morally bound to stand up and say “no”. The answer to that question wasn’t unanimous, and we have some work to do in restoring some of the relationships that were severed as we wrestled through that. But, praise God, every true church agrees that THIS is a line that we will not cross. We will never, ever, stop preaching the gospel!

The Apostles and the New Testament church held firm to this conviction even as they were imprisoned, beaten and martyred. There were days of intimidation. There were days of DEATH. But the gospel went forward, and lost men and women were brought into the Kingdom of God. The gospel will NOT be restrained!

That was true then, and it is true today. If and when we are confronted with this same decision, I KNOW that we will rise to the task. And this confidence is not rooted in what I see in myself or in the church – no, this confidence is rooted in what Jesus promised us. And that leads us to the third lesson that we learn in this example:

3. The Gospel is fueled by the Holy Spirit

During Jesus’ earthly ministry – while the disciples were still riding with their spiritual training wheels – he gave them a warning, and he made them a promise. Luke records this in chapter 21 of his gospel. Jesus predicted his death, and he added this detail:

¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, **delivering you up to the synagogues** and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your

minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ **for I will give you a mouth and wisdom**, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. (Luke 21:12-15 ESV)

Jesus told his disciples, “I’m going to die, and you’re going to stand trial, but FEAR NOT! I will give you a mouth!” Isn’t that exactly what we see in this passage? Look again at verses 7-8:

And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸ Then Peter, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, said... (Acts 4:7-8a ESV)

If we are in Christ – if we are His church, indwelt by His Spirit – then He will not leave us without a mouth! Praise God for that! If our ability to witness – if the success of our gospel ministry – is contingent upon our I.Q., then we might as well throw in the towel!

But, praise God, the gospel is not empowered by our intelligence! It is empowered by the Spirit of God Himself! Therefore, who are we to fear? As the Apostle Paul reminds us:

the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:25 NIV)

Now, am I suggesting that we should be intellectually lazy? Of course not! Study to show yourself approved. Do your homework. Prepare yourself to give a defense for the hope that you have. Yes! Being prepared is important. Study is important.

But it is NOT ENOUGH! You can be well-studied, but without the help of the Holy Spirit you will be EATEN ALIVE out there! It’s not enough! But a person who has done their homework and who is filled with the Holy Spirit – well that person will change the world! As G. Campbell Morgan notes:

If one man be threatened by a Tribunal, composed of the forces of culture, there is a little hope of him; **but if that man be filled with the Holy Spirit**, he will challenge the whole company, and the victory will be with him.³

Your main takeaway from this chapter should not be, “Be prepared!” or even, “Be courageous!” Those are good lessons, but they are not the primary lesson here. No, the lesson here is: “Be

³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 123.

FILLED!” The gospel is fueled by the Holy Spirit. And that leads to the next lesson we learn in this passage:

4. The Gospel is preached by transformed lives

As wise and as confident and as powerful as this Sanhedrin was, they couldn’t find a way to overcome the testimony of the transformed life that stood before them. We read in verse 14:

But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. (Acts 4:14 ESV)

They were prepared for an intellectual battle. They had studied all their lives! This fisherman and his friend would be no match for 70 of the brightest minds in Judaism!

And they were prepared for the political battle. They knew how to turn the steering wheel of bureaucracy. They knew how to play to the whims of the crowd. They had pulled the strings that led to Jesus’ crucifixion, and they could do the same with these men.

But the problem that they couldn’t plan their way out of was the transformed man.

I won’t stand here and pretend that there haven’t been seasons in my life when doubts have crept in – seasons when the skeptics’ argument sounds overwhelmingly convincing, and when the answers I’ve memorized feel underwhelming. I have had those days.

But then I see the transformed man.

I see one staring back at me in the mirror, and I marvel at all that God has done in me. I see him standing in the congregation, next to the transformed woman – parents of a transformed family.

The Holy Spirit wins men and women into the Kingdom through sermons and arguments to be sure. But it is often the walking, talking, testimony of a transformed life that serves as the final blow to the heart of stone. G. Campbell Morgan says:

The Church has no argument unless she has a healed man, and the Church that is not healing men, remaking them, has no argument for her Christianity⁴

That's the fourth lesson we learn in this story. Fifth, as we minister in a hostile world, we need to remember that:

5. The Gospel pulls no punches

The Sadducees denied the resurrection. The chief priests had led the way in putting Jesus to death. These men had proven that they were willing to KILL in order to suppress the message of the gospel of Jesus. They called Peter and John to stand before them, and they asked:

By what power or by what name did you do this? (Acts 4:7b ESV)

At this point, Peter and John could have chosen an easy way out. They could have given an honest, yet palatable answer. They could have said, "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob caused this man to walk." That would have been true, and no one in the room would have been offended.

While none of us have ever stood before the Sanhedrin, all of us have found ourselves in situations where we have been forced to choose between courage or compromise.

Your old friend asks you why you don't party like you used to.

Your boss pulls you into the office and asks why you're not wearing the rainbow lapel that he gave out to the team.

Your co-worker is annoyed that you won't join him in stealing a little bit from the company.

Courage or compromise. Offense or acceptance. We all find ourselves in these dilemmas, and we would all do well to learn from Peter and John's example. They looked into the eyes of these 70 men who held their lives in their hands and explained:

⁴ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 124.

let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. (Acts 4:10 ESV)

“This man was healed in the name of Jesus! You remember Jesus – right? He was the man that YOU crucified. He was the man that was RESURRECTED. And it was in HIS name that we healed this man.”

If we want to transform the world, then we need to resist the ever-present urge to edit the gospel. As a friend of mine recently reminded me, “Clear is kind.” If we’re going to preach the gospel in a hostile world – to REALLY preach it – then we will need to resolve ourselves to tell the truth. And that includes telling the truth about sin. John Owen once wrote:

It is to be feared that very many have little knowledge of the main enemy that they carry about with them in their bosoms.⁵

The Sanhedrin were guilty of killing the King of kings. They needed to be confronted with that reality if there was any hope of their redemption. Your co-worker, your neighbor, your parent needs to be confronted with the reality that God is holy, and that we are not, and that our sin is a very real problem!

We will face a real temptation to conceal the offensive pieces of the gospel – especially in a hostile world. But if we are going to be faithful with this assignment, then we need to tell the truth about sin. The gospel doesn’t pull any punches. But we can’t stop there! Because, while the gospel doesn’t pull any punches, the gospel also never leaves its listeners lying on the mat, because:

6. The Gospel is Jesus!

The word “Gospel” literally means “Good News!” The Gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ to secure our salvation. Peter couldn’t be any clearer about that in his address to the Sanhedrin. Look again at what he says to them:

⁵ John Owen, Kelly M. Kapic, and Justin Taylor eds., *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 76.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11-12 ESV)

If you were building a house, the cornerstone was the foundation stone at its farthest corner where the construction would begin. The cornerstone fixes the site of the new build and determines its direction.⁶ With his cornerstone reference, Peter is alluding to Psalm 118 – a Psalm that these leaders would have memorized when they were children. He is saying here: “You are the builders! God gave YOU this responsibility! You are the religious leaders. You are the teachers. You are the worship leaders. How is it, then, that you failed to recognize Jesus – the CORNERSTONE?! You’ve missed your exit! You’ve lost the plot!”

Peter’s not just declaring the good news *about* Jesus... Jesus IS the good news!

He is the fulfillment of the promises of God! As Paul would later write:

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. (2 Corinthians 1:20a ESV)

The alternative is also true. All of the promises of God are “no” apart from him. When Judaism rejected Jesus, it became a dead religion. Every worldview without Jesus is a dead worldview. Every answer for what ultimately plagues the world, and plagues your marriage, and plagues your conscience is a dead end unless it points you to the only true solution – and the solution is JESUS! Peter declares:

And there is salvation in **no one else**, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 ESV)

Jesus said the exact same thing:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.** (John 14:6b ESV)

The hope of the world is not more education. The hope of your marriage is not more effort. The hope of your addiction is not more discipline. What you ultimately need is not a new set of

⁶ See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 240.

circumstances, or a new lease on life, or a new spouse who helps you to reach your potential. No, what you need, is what Peter needed, is what the Sanhedrin needed and is what the entire world needs. You need JESUS! As Martyn Lloyd-Jones summarizes it:

What the New Testament tells you to do always, in the first instance, is to forget yourself all together - to forget all your problems, your temptations, your difficulties, everything else; to forget yourself and look at the Lord Jesus Christ.⁷

And that brings me to our concluding lesson from this passage:

7. The Gospel demands a response

Peter told these men, and I am telling you this morning, that apart from Jesus you are CONDEMNED! To reject Jesus is to reject God's plan of salvation. There is salvation in no one else! And to reject God's plan of salvation is to remain under the curse of sin.

The religious leaders rejected him. They flogged him, and they taunted him, and they hung him on a tree. But little did they know, they were fulfilling the plan that God had set in motion before the foundation of the world. There, on that cross, as the sinless Son of God cried out, "It is finished!" a way of salvation was made for the world!

He suffered a death that he did not deserve, and he paid a debt that he did not owe. It was your death he died. It was your debt he paid. And, if you place your trust in him, he will take your sin and remove it from you as far as the East is from the West.

But if you reject him, then there is no answer for your sin. No one comes to the Father except through him. If you reject him, when you stand before our Holy and Righteous God, you will be condemned in your sin. He will send you to hell – the eternal judgement reserved for rebels and sinners. Richard Baxter wrote:

Oh Lord, that men did but know what everlasting glory and everlasting torments are: would they then hear us as they do?⁸

⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans – An Exposition of Chapter 6 – The New Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), 98.

⁸ Richard Baxter as quoted in Warren Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World's Great Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 22.

Nothing else in the world is as important as this. Jesus Christ has invited you to find salvation in him, and heaven and hell stand in the balance. This is an announcement that demands a response.

The intelligent, powerful, prideful religious leaders suppressed the truth. They ignored the evidence, imprisoned the messengers, and enjoyed the life that they had made for themselves.

But the church grew to 5,000 members that day. Even as Peter and John were carried away and thrown into prison, thousands of men and women confessed their sin, turned away from their former lives, and placed their trust in Jesus.

It was costly. Carrying a cross always is. But those people understood that there is no other name by which man can be saved. And today, those Christians are in the presence of their savior, awaiting their reward. And the Sanhedrin are awaiting their terrifying judgement.

How will you respond to what you have seen and heard?