

Acts | The Incendiary Fellowship

The Clash

Acts 4.11-32a

5.29.16

"He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. ¹² "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. ¹⁵ But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name." ¹⁸ And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; ²² for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

²³ When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, ²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? ²⁶ 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' ²⁷ "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. ²⁹ "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, ³⁰ while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. ³² And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul...

We've been looking at The Book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles or Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles). This is St. Luke's history of the First Century Church.

When we tuned in last week...and if that sounds like the intro to a drama, well this IS a drama...and last week the CONFLICT began to show up... That's an essential element in narrative (we remember that from our High School English Class) – there has to be a plot-line and the plot has to involve characters in CONFLICT and now, in our drama, that CONFLICT has emerged.

Today we want to delve deeper into this CONFLICT and we'll see: it's bigger than it first appears. It's much bigger than most of the original characters understood...it's a CLASH of colossal proportion.

The "powers that be" (as we say) are being challenged... The incumbent administration of the Temple in Jerusalem...the seat/center of Jewish authority for 1000 years is facing a THREAT...and it's coming from a bunch of ... agitators and blue-collar nobodies from out in the country... "Who ARE these guys?"

It made me think (on this Memorial Day weekend) of Lech Wałęsa (the son of a carpenter, himself an electrician). He challenged the communist party in Poland and the ripple effect was so far reaching ...maybe the first step in the collapse of Communism in Europe.

And when this kind of thing happens, a clash...two riders approaching as in a joust and only one can survive...a revolution... (as Dickens wrote – opening words of A Tale of Two Cities: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...") It's like an earthquake – everything shakes/shifts...upheaval.

And that's what we want to observe today – how the message of the Gospel (basic idea in Christianity) how it leads inevitably to a CLASH – it invites us into a Palace, where everything is free, everything is OURS...but in order to get in, we walk through a door so narrow that all the boxes and bags and luggage we are carrying JUST WON'T FIT...so we have to put them down to squeeze through the narrow door that leads to Abundant Life. Let's look at:

- 1) The RESISTANCE of the Old Powers**
- 2) A PRAYER MEETING That Shook the World**
- 3) The WISDOM OF RESIGNATION**

To put us back into the story: the Apostles are going to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray. On their way IN, they see a man who was begging and NOT allowed inside because he was disabled...not whole, not flawless, he's lame since birth and now 40 years old.

They offer him a hand and IN THE NAME of Jesus Christ the man is miraculously healed and he LEAPS to his feet! He hurdles over the demands of the Law by grace... the Law was an obstacle but Jesus Christ qualifies the man to enter the Temple and to even become a stone in the New Temple God is building made up of living stones... Jesus Christ is the foundation-stone and people are the building.

Peter has to explain the sign (what is sign-i-fied!) was that God who raised this man also raised Jesus Christ whom the Temple leaders had crucified. The healing signified that God resurrected Jesus Christ and in the same way God will fix everything that's broken.

Then, the Sadducees (they were a sect who didn't believe in a resurrection) they were really mad at these Galileans for talking about the resurrection ON THEIR TURF...and since they were in POWER...they had the Apostles arrested.

But, as we saw last week, they were granted boldness. Jesus had promised that His Spirit would empower them in these conflicts...and He did.

Today we pick up at the very end of Peter's defense where he quotes the 118th Psalm about Jesus Christ being the Cornerstone in the True Temple (the builders rejected the BEST Stone!) And then Peter says those "divisive" words: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name ... given ... by which we must be saved." (12)

And as he makes this exclusive claim...in front of these super-important, well-placed, powerful aristocrats (I'm sure a very intimidating bunch...71 of THE most influential men in Jerusalem...the guardians of this ancient institution...the keepers of the Axis Mundi – the center of the world – The Temple!) these holy men hear these fishermen and conclude, "Hmmm...how is it that unschooled laborers are so UNINITIMIDATED and bright?" And they recognized that they had been students of Jesus.

And the "old guard" really doesn't know how to respond...because...this lame man is standing there (and everyone has seen him...he's been seen by virtually everyone who entered the Temple for years – he was a fixture...) So, they make the Apostles wait in the hall and they deliberate...

And when they bring Peter and John back...it's... kind of funny...'cause they got nothing! The "powers that be" are...sort of powerLESS...and they say, "STOP IT!"

And Peter says, "That's it?! That's all you got?! The collective wisdom of the Temple leaders...the holiest men in the world and just "STOP IT!?" ...But how did it happen? Isn't it clear to you that GOD DID THIS? And IF GOD DID THIS...then why would we STOP IT?"

And then they use a trick that Jesus used to use, "YOU BE THE JUDGE...is it right for us to obey God or man?".... AND OF COURSE THE ANSWER IS OBEY GOD...but the Great Sanhedrin is stumped (comedy in the midst of the DRAMA!)

And they end the trial by strongly reiterating their mealy-mouthed, evasive, non-answer... (21) "When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) ... "and DON'T YOU DO THAT ANY MORE or we'll get mad"

It's all a picture...that God had left the Temple...and at the Center of the world...was a bunch of wisdom-less wise-men... But now a New Temple is being built with a Cornerstone...who was the God-Man... As is so often the case in revolution: the Old Regime falls of its own weight... and

from its ashes (and there will eventually be ashes) but from the ashes, the Phoenix arises...a new Temple made of people.

Peter and John (who BTW may have been very young men even in their 20s) they went back to the other believers in Jesus Christ and reported all that the priests and elders had said... I picture the young believers asking, "Really? That's all they said?"

And when it dawns on them that the Old Power is sort of like the Wizard of Oz – a lot of bluster and smoke...but no reality...God is NOT impressed...God is not intimidated...God is IN CONTROL.

And when that dawns on the people who are trusting in the Name of Jesus Christ, they spontaneously break out in a prayer meeting...

They address God in an unusual way, "O Lord" is really the word "despot" – meaning someone with absolute POWER (see there's the counterfeit power/TRUE POWER). It's used only 10X in the New Testament and Luke only used it twice in all his writings: here and at that moment when the INFANT Jesus was presented at the Temple and the Old Man Simeon "took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, 'Now Despot, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace.'" (Luke 2:28-29)

In both cases it's a way of laughing with God – that when the powers of religion...and the insecurity of people who think they're in control...when we were so sure we kept God out of the Temple and out of our lives... HE, the Benevolent Despot, the Almighty King...He sneaks in, in a Stroller... the Baby is God... the Wise are confounded and all our Hideous Strength can't keep God out and can't keep God from working out His wonderful plan.

They call out, "O Omnipotent LORD (Benevolent Despot over all creation) - "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them (24) – it's a phrase that can be found in a number of places in the Hebrew Bible (see Neha 9.6) but it always highlights that God is IN CONTROL – when we forget it, we should eat a peach and we'll be reminded that THIS IS NO COSMIC ACCIDENT....we look all around us and say, "The beauty and order of this world, the galaxies and the universe...it had a beginning...it was made the Almighty Benevolent Despot...the heavens declare His glory...the God who has all the power..."

And then from the Book of Creation, their prayer recalls the book of Scripture, "who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?'" (25)

This Psalm (Ps. 2) inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by David is a retelling of a theme that repeats itself over and over in human history. You first see it in Genesis Ch. 11, the Tower of Babel...humanity trying to get OUT from under the reign of God and rely on ourselves as if we had ANY POWER IN OURSELVES.

And God is saying in this poetic exposé of the Babel theme...“Don’t you see, YOU need me for everything and I delight to give you all you need in LAVISH ABUNDANCE...but for you to try to overthrow Me or exclude Me...is absurd... “Why do the nations rage and the people devise a vain thing?”

The leaders of the Temple have lost their minds... they’ve turned the Temple into the Tower of Babel because they’ve USED it to keep God out of their lives... and to preserve their power illusion.

The second Psalm goes on: “He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them...and says ‘as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain’.” (Psalm 2.4,6)

The Real Power is calling out to us...He is even calling out to these religious frauds in the Sanhedrin, “Why run from Me? I’m come to heal YOU...I have (v.30) extended My hand to heal...I have entered in...I have become a Man...I stretched out My hand...I stretched out MY HANDS... for you ...MY PREDESTINED PLAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO LIVE IN YOUR PLACE AND DIE IN YOUR PLACE...Why run? I love you...I want to heal you

AND they pray with that understanding: “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus... the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.” (27-28)

It’s as if they’re praying, “Sovereign King – YOU fell deliberately into our hands...so we could NAIL Your hands to a beam...so that OUR GUILT could be paid for...THIS WAS ALWAYS YOUR PLAN...”

And the prayer ends, “Now Lord, (the normal NT word for Lord, this time) Lord, we want everyone to know about this...even if it costs our lives...Lord make us bold with this message...while You continue to extend your hand to heal...”

And while the power was shaking/shifting from the Old Temple to the New...from the fake power of silly old men to the Real Power of the God who extends His hands to heal...and while they prayed with this in mind...the very ground begins shaking/shifting: “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.” (31) A prayer meeting that shook the world!

Now, just a word on this last point: The Wisdom of Resignation. The Second Psalm (which is the basis for this earth-shattering prayer) ...and when someone in this Jewish gathering of believers quoted a part of a Psalm, everyone finished it in their own minds...so they know that this Psalm ends with the words: “Submit to the son, that he not be angry and your way lead to your

destruction, for his wrath may soon be kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him". (12)

The point is – the power has shifted...and the earth has quaked... the phony power of people trying to hold on to our positions or status...or our WAY... It's exposed...like Babel... It will end in desolation and absurdity. It's laughable...like pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps...it's a farce...He who sits in the heaven laughs.

But WHY would you WANT to run from Him who loves you with an everlasting love. It's the old story of the Blue Whale who wanted to be free to live in the Sahara Desert... That's not freedom – it's a dead-end ...It's Not power; It's mire...quicksand. Only God knows what will fulfill us, only the God who stretched out His hands.

The God who stretches His hands to heal (v.30) – He alone has the power and the love to sort me out and make me new. He is calling me to drop my illusions because they're killing me...they're absurd and they're incongruous with the way He made me.

And when I resign myself to Him...i.e. when I believe in Jesus Christ...when I fall into His arms and receive forgiveness and new life...He begins to lead me in a way very different from the fear of the Temple and the insecure leaders who were holding on to their power illusions...a new motivation begins to assert Himself in ...a Spirit...THE Spirit fills and empowers.

Maybe...for the first time...maybe for the thousandth time...why don't you call upon the God – resign yourself to the New Power, submit to the Son and His saving and healing...i.e. trust Him now? Express it in the quiet of this moment...maybe He'll sweetly shake us up.

Let's pray.