

Acts 4

This morning the lesson is about **Leadership in the Face of Opposition**

If you weren't here when we talked about Acts 3, you would have learned about Peter and John healing a lame man at the temple gate, where everyday, worshippers passed him by. Verse 22 of Acts 4 gives us some additional information – he had been that way for 40 years since birth.

In chapter 3 the man begs Peter and John for money, and they say, “We don't have any money – but what we do have we give you – in the name of Jesus, get up and walk.” The man is made whole – he's jumping and leaping and praising God, and this creates an opportunity for Peter and John to preach the Good News of Jesus to a crowd that was no doubt in the hundreds and thousands.

And the whole event creates quite a stir – and that's where our story picks up in verse 1.

And before we go there – I want you to think about this: **up until this point**, the church is growing/multiplying. Lives are being changed, people are being healed, there is joyful worship, people are coming to Jesus by the thousands.

But when we get to chapter 4, for the first time, we see the church face opposition and persecution.

Isn't it always true – that when you get on fire for Jesus, the devil is waiting with a bucket of water to put out the flame?

And what we see (and what we have to know is) – when you get with God – opposition will always come.

And we shouldn't be surprised. Listen to Jesus' words:

John 15:18-20; 2 Timothy 3:12

Now it's interesting – most evangelistic preaching in the religious world doesn't focus on that at all, but on what? Blessings.

But often in our effort to preach the blessings of God, we fail to talk about the blessing of SUFFERING. We live in a time where we give a lot of attention to avoiding suffering.

But we will see today that when we learn to embrace it with courage, that's when some of God's greatest work will be done through us.

Acts 4:1-7

The priests and the **captain of the temple guard (chief of police)** and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were **greatly disturbed (means “agitated” or “annoyed”)** because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

Now – there were several groups of people didn't like this Jesus movement. And it's important to know who they are.

1. The Pharisees. Interestingly, two of them – Caiaphas and Annas (the High Priest) – had participated in the trial of Jesus some weeks before – so this is like Deja vu for them.

2. And then there were the Sadducees – who believed in God, but didn't believe in Jesus as the Messiah – they didn't believe in angels or the resurrection. They didn't believe in the afterlife (which makes me wonder why they even believed in God at all).

And so the religious experts come together against Peter and John – because that's what super religious people do – they seem to always make life hard for everyone else. Jesus said “they place heavy loads on other people's shoulders.”

All you want is FREEDOM IN CHRIST – and they're always pouring water on your change – telling you things like “you didn't do this in the right church” or “you didn't do this the right way – *which is the way WE do it.*”

But here's the thing you have to remember – WHEN YOU ADVANCE ON DARKNESS, IT ALWAYS PUSHES BACK! Always. (Some of you today – don't be surprised at that). You're trying to walk in freedom, and friends, old habits, religious people you have known, push back.

And so since the Sadducees held the power, their response was to have Peter and John put in jail overnight.

(But remember – while this is going on – the church has grown from 12, to 120, to 3000, not to 5000 men – probably more like 20,000 people).

The church doesn't slow down, because whenever we see persecution, we always see growth. Always!

Verse 8-12

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: **(By the way – being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a one time thing, but a reoccurring experience).**

“Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: 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. ¹¹Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the cornerstone.’ **(He's quoting Psalm 118:22 from the OT simply to say, “You guys – religious leaders – are the “builders” of Israel, but you rejected the whole thing God was building – His Kingdom!”)**

And then we have the most absolute statement in Scripture on salvation through Christ alone:

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

That was an unbelievable claim. So a couple of things:

1. Peter and John told people, “It is by the name of Jesus that this man was raised from the dead.” Which is a good reminder – that whatever success we have in life, we need to remind them it's because of Jesus.

Are your finances good? Your health good? Your church growing? It's all because of HIM! Right? God gets all the glory.

2. Notice with what boldness these men speak!

Listen - they are talking to their king's killer about the king they killed. But God empowers them to speak!

Ever had such a Holy Spirit moment - verse 8 – they were “filled” with the Holy Spirit)? You don’t know what to say, but God gives it to you?

A moment ago, you didn’t know what to say- but now you do. Or maybe you didn’t know who to call or text, but God puts somebody on your mind. It’s a holy spirit moment.

Here – the Holy Spirit gives them the words they are going to say.

In Luke 12:11-12 – Jesus gave that promises:

¹¹ “When you are brought before . . . rulers and authorities, do not worry about . . . what you will say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”

And I love this - the same Peter who cowered before the challenge of a little servant girl (Luke 22:56-57) now fearlessly confronts the Sanhedrin.

13-14

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, **(they had no special training in the Scriptures)** they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

Don’t you think we need to be very careful about whom we judge as an “educated person?”

Louie Lamore – you recognized that name? Wrote over 100 novels, has 320 million copies in print – said things like “victory is won in miles, not inches?”

Louie Lamore only had a 10th grade education, but he hungered for knowledge.

Listen – never feel like you’re “less than” because you don’t have letters by your name. (And for those who have those letters, be very careful how you size people up).

Because there are plenty of people who’ve been with Jesus – and that makes them smarter and wiser than all of the college degrees combined, right?

And so, what did the religious leaders notice about these men? They “TOOK NOTE” they had been with Jesus.

Ben illustrated this well Sunday when he said, “You can tell what people have been doing. You can tell when someone’s been watching too much news. You can get wrapped up in that. And a lot of it’s not of God either. You can tell when someone’s been spending too much time on Facebook or social media.

You can tell when someone’s been spending too much time talking about other people – just watch. But people are taking note of you, right?

I asked our Wednesday morning class – “In your estimation, what are the marks you look for to tell if someone has been with Jesus?” Here’s a few:

1. Their presence will tell you when they greet you.
2. They are able to speak easily and powerfully.
3. There is a kindness, not a harshness about them, and the longer you are around them, the more you know it to be true.
4. Compassion and concern.
5. Confidence in their faith.
6. They have an ability to speak into a situation with Scripture.

7. Humility, wisdom, gentleness and grace
8. At peace – our oldest member said, “if I’ve been with Jesus, I feel at peace.”
9. Another said, “Calm, prayerful, thankful, and nothing to fear.”

When people see you, can they tell you’ve been spending time with Jesus? We are in desperate need for that.

15-17

¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” **(Because the last thing you want is all the lame people getting up our of their wheel chairs – right?)**

Well: Spoiler alert – there’s 23 chapters left in Acts.

18-22

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **(They’re like, “We’re serious! If we see any more lepers without spots, we’re coming after you!)** ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

(These men just kept talking – and these displays of power weren’t going to stop them then, and they still won’t today.)”

²¹ After further threats they let them go. **(WE’RE SERIOUS! If we see any more lepers without spots, we’re coming after you!!!”)**

They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Why do men reject the obvious? Here’s at least one reason: Because when you take away someone’s power, they’ll fight you every time! BUT – they’re powerless, because they’re up against men of wisdom and faith!

And so Peter and John are going to be released – but it’s what they do immediately after that has something powerful to teach us:

23-24

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they **raised their voices together in prayer to God.** “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

You see what they’re doing? They’re first response to persecution was what? To pray, and pray together!

My experience with prayer growing up was – listening, but not talking. As leader – the greatest help to my prayer life is praying out loud, speaking in group.

They prayed together they prayed out loud together - and what do they do? They affirm the sovereignty of God! “Lord, this problem’s big, but it’s not bigger than you!”

When we feel like our country is going down the tubes – affirm the sovereignty of God.

When you're facing an illness, when your loved one says she doesn't believe in God – affirm the plans, the sovereignty, the miracle-working power of God! (That's what they did)!

YOU SEE – the most important thing to bear in mind in a crisis – is the sovereignty of God!

And THEN (I love this)– they quote scripture. They pray Scripture over the situation:

Verses 25-26

²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain? **(We shouldn't be surprised at what they're doing, but they're doing it in vain.)**

²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord

and against his anointed one. ^{[b] [c]} Psalm 2;1,2

Praying out loud built their faith – Romans 10:17 says “faith comes by hearing the Word.”

When they read the Word – they didn't just read Scripture – they saw themselves as the STORY of scripture. They didn't just read the word, they lived the Word.

They affirmed that in all ages, kings and the power of the world are no match for the power of God!

So here's the thing to remember: the devil can't read your thoughts. He is not omniscient. But God knows our thoughts, our motives. The devil does not.

And so like them - take your fight to the enemy by praying out loud.

The devil can't read minds, but he hears our prayers.

Ephesians 6:12 says to stand your ground against the devil.

Just keep affirming God's sovereign plan over the situation:

Then – last part:

27-28

²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate **(who gave Jesus over to be crucified)** met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Here's what they were saying – “they intended it to harm us, but you intended it for good.”)

Even when evil thinks it's winning, it's already lost.

29-30 – so they continued to pray . . .

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Don't you love that? They didn't pray, “Lord, bring vengeance upon our enemies – rain fire down on them (which is what John would have done before) – they didn't pray for miracles of vengeance, but for miracles of MERCY!”

They didn't pray to be delivered from suffering –they prayed to have strength for the challenge!

And what was the result?

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

They prayed together, they prayed with faith, they prayed the Scripture, they prayed for mercy – AND WHAT HAPPENED?

THE ROOM SHOOK! Faith in the face of opposition will always shake the world.

And so this morning – I want to end with a word about persecution -

THE INSANITY OF GOD

Nik Ripkin

In the Book, “The Insanity of God,” Nik Ripken tells about his trips to Communist China to interview Christians who had been persecuted for their faith so that he might learn from their experience and wisdom in helping future missionaries who go to difficult places.

In one chapter, he tells about his undercover visit with a number of church planters in China. They make the long, undisclosed journey to the meeting place, and he writes:

When I entered the room, I was welcomed by a man who introduced me to a small gathering of evangelists and church planters . . . He asked me to share a little about myself and explain the reasons for my visit.

He ushered me around the room and made individual introductions before we sat down for dinner saying there would be time for individual interviews later.

One of the younger men in the room, perhaps twenty-five years old, was anxious to set a time for an individual interview appointment.

After we were out of earshot from that young house-church leader, my host leaned toward me and whispered: "He's going to be someone God can use in a powerful way someday. But you cannot trust what he says now; he hasn't been to prison yet."

This was an attitude that I would encounter often in China.

Personal trust and respect for spiritual maturity were often in direct proportion to the amount of suffering that had been endured for the faith. If someone had not yet experienced personal persecution and suffering, trust was withheld until that happened.

Today – you may not have to go to jail for your faith. But if you're persecuted – if you lash out, if you're hateful, it's hard to trust that.

It's impossible for people to look to you for spiritual counsel and leadership.

But when you embrace your suffering with respect and love, we can trust that. You'll be the wise counsel we seek.

What do we read?

Verse 13 -

¹³When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.