

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

PERSECUTION (ACTS 4:1-7)

PETER'S MESSAGE GREATLY BOTHERED THEM

Peter brought the message of a literal and personal Savior that resurrected from the dead and used angels to give this message to 2 women, everything the majority of the Sanhedrin didn't believe in. So, they responded by putting Peter and John in jail overnight because another 2000 had been added to the 3000.

NOW STARTS THE PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS

Chapter 4 shows us the beginning of physical opposition to the teachings of Jesus by His followers. Notice, in the face of persecution, the message of Christ still progressed rapidly. **"The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church."** -Tertullian

"BY WHAT POWER OR NAME HAVE YOU DONE THIS?"

The religious leaders couldn't have lobbed Peter an easier ball to hit. The answer to this question was why they were in the temple teaching. The question wasn't just about the healed man, but about their teachings.

- Sitting in jail, Jesus' words probably ran through their minds: **"If they hate you, remember they hated me first."** (John 15)

GUTS (ACTS 4:8-12)

"THEN PETER WAS FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT..."

Peter was more than happy to answer their question because he knew the answer and was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

- Peter was a humble, uneducated fisherman completely unaccustomed to public speaking, but now stands before the highest authority in the land.

PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD

Peter asks if they are referring to the man and by what means he was healed; the answer is to "be known to all" that it was Jesus Christ. He adds on, "whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead."

Of course we use tact and respect, but when asked by what means we succeed in, we must be clear.

THE BEGINNING IS ALSO THE END

Peter quotes Psalm 118:22 that implies the God of creation that they claimed to follow has manifested Himself and they've rejected Him.

- **This "Stone" that they've rejected is the "cornerstone" of everything. He is the beginning and the end. Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God.** (Colossians 1:15)

"THERE IS SALVATION IN NO ONE ELSE"

Here's where Christianity gets offensive. V12 says clearly that Jesus is the only one that saves. Exclusivity of the Bible is the most dividing statement of our faith.

- In our day we can easily get off the hook by saying we believe in "God," but **Christians are to exclusively teach one man to salvation: Jesus Christ.**

THE NAME (ACTS 4:13-22)

WHO ARE THESE GUYS AGAIN?

After Peter spoke with such authority, the powerful Sanhedrin were amazed that men with no formal training or credentials could communicate the way they did.

- **There's nothing wrong with education and credentials, but our real authority and strength come from spending time with Jesus.**

IT WAS HARD TO ARGUE THE FACTS

The powerful words were spoken and a healed man stood in front of them. At this, the council was left with nothing to say. Jail didn't work and denial was impossible, so now they had to do damage control. They essentially passed a law that the name of Jesus could not be taught in Jerusalem.

WE CANNOT BE SILENT

We are to follow the law of the land unless it impedes our ability to speak truth, especially the truth of Jesus. Peter and John basically said the Sanhedrin can pass whatever laws, but they will not be silent about Christ.

- **Over gov't, philosophy, culture, or even religious practice, the truth of the Word takes precedent with the Christian.**

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE INTIMIDATION

Gov't, religion, and culture tried to intimidate followers of Jesus to remain still and quiet, but in the 1st century it didn't work. People will say you're too right, left, boring, closed-minded, idealistic, pessimistic, or worse. **Just stay in the uncomfortable counter-cultural teachings of Jesus.**

REFILLED (ACTS 4:23-31)

HEY, GUESS WHAT HAPPENED TO US!

After Peter and John were released, they went back and told the other Believers what had happened. They not only saw this as a win, but a fulfillment of Psalm 2. The fact that their persecution was predestined by God gave them comfort.

- **All Christians will suffer for Christ in some way; this is an honor.**

GOD IS INVOLVED IN THE PRESENT

As the Believers prayed together, they acknowledged God's involvement in what they were doing. They prayed for Him to "grant that Your slaves may speak Your message" and to be vessels for healing and miracles.

- **It is easy to deal with a conceptual "Creator," but Jesus came to show God is personal and involved daily.**

NOT JUST PERSONAL, BUT HOLDING US ACCOUNTABLE

If we understand that God is not abstract, but personal, we must also understand that we are held accountable for our knowledge of His ways and teachings.

- **Jesus came to give humanity clarity about God, and now all people will be held accountable "for every word and deed"** (Matthew 12:36).

GOD IS ALSO AWARE OF THE SUFFERING

Just like God had a purpose for the suffering of Christ on the cross, Christians also will share in suffering, but God not only knows, He is still in control.

- Notice in v29 they **pray for motivation and strength to keep ministering even in the face of danger. It was not a prayer for relief, but for courage.**

AND GOD RESPONDED TO THEIR PRAYERS

After they prayed the room "was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak God's message with boldness."

- We see that **God will not leave us powerless, that we must be refilled with His Spirit in order to be effective, and that we must pray in order to prepare for trials ahead.**

GENEROUS (ACTS 4:32-37)

THIS SOUNDS FAMILIAR

Acts 4:32-37 sounds a lot like Acts 2:43-47. Luke mentions the generosity and unity of the early church to further instill in the reader how Christians should live.

- **Not only did they share and show concern for others, they were united in heart (passion) and mind (mission).**

CHRISTIANITY IS TO BE BALANCED

We're not a closed society, but we are to treat other Believers as family. We're responsible to share with others, but we cannot enable bad behavior. We're called to make a social impact, but we cannot compromise our beliefs. **The HS gives wisdom and discernment so we can achieve a balanced life.**

POSSESSION VS. STEWARDSHIP

Luke writes, "no one said that any of their possessions was their own, but instead held everything in common." This isn't socialism, but an acknowledgement that everything we have ultimately belongs to God.

- Stewardship is managing someone else's possessions. In such a consumerist culture, even the church struggles with this.

WE NEED EXAMPLES AND MODELS

Luke mentions Joseph as an example of someone that is gracious and so giving that he sold property in order to meet the needs of the people around him.

- **We need to be modeling Christ so others can be encouraged and inspired to love their community. Not for our glory, but for His.**

OUR SOCIETY IS HEMORRHAGING

- If we are to make an impact the way God has called His people to do, we must prepare ourselves to suffer and engage the mess.

WE ARE THE IMAGE BEARERS

- We must understand that the road we have chosen can be a brutal one.
- We must have the courage to speak truth in love, even if we are hated for it.
- We must empty ourselves of sin and pray
- that we're filled with the Holy Spirit.
- We must read the Word, pray, and commune with other Believers.
- We must steward well, share with others, give our time, talents, money, truths, and testimonies to those that need it.
- We must love and show respect to **every** person we encounter.
- This is how we will be known as followers of Christ.