

March 3, 2024
As You Are Going: Come What May
Acts 4:1-12
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro/Theme...

Last week we saw that when given the opportunity, Peter shared the Gospel with the crowd that had gathered because of the healing of the lame man. Peter exalted Jesus by telling them who Jesus is and what he had done. He confronted them with their guilt before God because of their sin and offered the gift of forgiveness if they would repent of their sin and turn to God. Although not an exhaustive list, these “points” give us a blueprint for what to cover in every opportunity were given to share the Gospel. But we need to realize that not every encounter we have will be a positive one. Even though everyone needs to hear it not everyone wants to hear it. And we need to be ready and willing to share the Good News of Jesus Christ come what may.

Animosity toward the Gospel message is nothing new. We see in the Gospels that the religious leaders hated Jesus and they wanted nothing to do with him or his kingdom. And as the Gospels close we see that they succeeded with their plan by putting Him to death. They did so thinking that was the last they would hear of Jesus. But it wasn't. First of all; there was the problem of the resurrection. They knew that Jesus had promised he would rise from the dead and that this would be the "sign" which would prove he was who he claimed to be, the Messiah of God. They sent out soldiers to investigate but they couldn't produce the body of Jesus, and resorted to paying off the guards to spread the lie that his disciples had come and stolen the body in the night that we read about in Matt. 28:11-25.

Then there was the problem of the apostles themselves, transformed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and preaching that Jesus had been raised from the dead. And many thousands were believing their message. Not only that, but now a well-known lame man, crippled for more than forty years, has been very publicly healed in the name of Jesus. The harder they tried to get rid Jesus of Nazareth the more the message flourished. This had to make them mad. What would they do?

Now, we left off last week as Peter finished his second sermon after healing the man in the Temple. Now, let's take a look and see what happened as a result of Peter's taking the opportunity to share the Gospel. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God. [Read Passage]

The first point I want to make this morning is I want us to see that the Apostles were arrested, not the Gospel (vs. 1-4) We're told that Peter's message was interrupted in vs. 1, “As they were speaking,” interesting that Luke records a plural “they” here indicating that both Peter and John and possibly even the formerly lame man, were sharing what they had witnessed Jesus do. But, “as they were speaking, the priest and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them,” and were told in vs. 3, that “they arrested them.” This seems to indicate that they stopped and seized Peter and John suddenly. They must have said, “Enough of this,” grabbed them, and taken them away. And this is the first persecution that the early church experiences. From here on out things will be different. From Acts 4 until the end of the book, 25 chapters covering over 30 years of the early church's history, there are only three chapters that do not include some form of persecution against the church including more arrests, stonings, and even

martyrdom. Jesus himself said to his disciples in Matt. 10:22, “you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who perseveres until the end will be saved.”

Now I want to introduce you to some of the characters that come on the scene here in this passage to hopefully help you make sense of what is really happening. The captain of the temple guard was a highly placed member of the high priest's family, second in command only to the high priest himself, and he was charged with temple security, the chief of the temple police if you will. It was the duty of the priests to keep guard at the gates of the temple, in order to prevent the unclean from entering. And the Sadducees were a certain group of the religious leaders that held power and sway over nearly every aspect of Jewish society. These were the Jewish aristocrats, or the extreme upper class if you will, known as much for their wealth and corruption as for their religious devotion. Because of this, they were always willing to run to Rome to squash any threat to their status and power. They controlled the two most important institutions of Jewish society, the Temple, which is why we see them on the scene here in our passage and they held the majority in the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish high court. More on that later as this scene plays out.

Luke tells us that this group was "greatly annoyed" in vs. 2. It is a strong word, and it means "thoroughly pained." It's one thing to be annoyed by a sound or being stuck in traffic. Its quite another to be annoyed to the point that your “thoroughly pained” and you’re willing to do something about it. Why were they so upset? Our text says it was because, "they (Peter and John) were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." They were upset because the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. And if there was so such thing as the resurrection, that meant Jesus was a fraud, and any teaching in his name was heresy. The preaching of the Gospel, and the resurrection specifically, put their whole system of thought and power in danger.

In their minds they had rid the world of Jesus and they thought that would stop the movement. Now, in just a few months, the movement was exploding in ways they could never have imagined. And in their panic, they arrest Peter and John and throw them in jail overnight to go on trial the next morning because our text tells us, “it was evening.”

But they couldn’t stop the message. Even though they had arrested Peter and John, the Gospel had been preached and there were many people who were there that day who believed as we’re told in vs. 4. [Read] The word used here for “men” is a word that was used to describe “heads of household.” It was an easier way of keeping track of large numbers of people and we’ve seen it before when Jesus fed the 5,000. There we read in Matthew 14:21, “and those who ate were about 5,000 men besides women and children.” Assuming that it wasn’t just men responding to the Gospel, but that there were also women and children who made up the early church, conservatively speaking that means that the church had grown from a small group of 120 in Acts 1 to at least 15,000 people in just the first few months of its existence. The followers of Jesus were becoming hard to ignore and this was a problem that threatened the power of the religious leaders. Interestingly, this is the last time Luke gives us any numbers relating to the size of the church in the Book of Acts, because, most likely, the church grew exponentially at such a fast rate they could no longer keep track. And no matter how hard the religious leaders tried to snuff out the Gospel the Church continued to grow.

After Peter and John spend the night in jail, they are then brought before the religious leaders and put on trial which brings us to our second point, filled with the Spirit, Peter speaks boldly (vs. 5-11). The group described here is the Sanhedrin, that I mentioned earlier, and it was the highest Jewish authority and governing body. It was made up of seventy-one men, the High

Priest who presided over the other 70 made up of, as described in vs. 5, “the rulers (these were the chief priests), the elders (important lay persons) and the Scribes (mainly but not entirely teachers of the Pharisees, the other religious sect of Judaism). Included in the Sanhedrin were a number of close relatives of the High Priest, some are named in our passage. Annas was the previous High Priest and father in law of the current High Priest High Priest, Caiaphas, both familiar names that we know from the Gospels whom Jesus stood before during his trial and who ordered him to be delivered over to the Romans for crucifixion. We don’t really know a lot about the John and Alexander mentioned here but they must have been prominent members of Jewish society for them to be named.

Vs. 7 tells us that, “they set them in their midst.” It was their custom to have high priest on one side of the room and the other members on the other side, seated in a semi-circle, with the accused in the middle. And the question they want answered is: "By what power, or in what name, did you do this?" They recognized that a miracle had undoubtedly been done. The man, well known to everyone for being a lame beggar, was standing before them in perfect health. Their question was one of authority. Jesus was often challenged in the same way. We read in Mark 11:28 that the chief priest, the elders and the scribes asked him during the passion week, days before they crucified him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”

This conversation had to be on their minds as they stood before the court. This same group had asked Jesus this same question and had him crucified a few days later. But Peter and John were not intimidated. As Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin they must have remembered the words that Jesus had spoken to them recorded in Matt. 10:18-20: “...and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

This promise of Christ was now being fulfilled. Our text says Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit." Now, not to get too grammatical this morning and lose you, this is where knowing a little bit of Greek, the original language of the NT, can come in handy. The verb “filled” is an aorist passive. This means that the “filling” was a past event and that it something that happened to Peter passively and nothing he did himself. What is Luke getting at here? Peter was already filled with the Spirit, and having been already filled with the Spirit, Peter takes the opportunity to share Jesus. He wasn’t “refilled,” as if he had run out of the Spirit, but having “already been filled” by the Sprit, when given the opportunity, Peter shared Jesus no matter what the consequences may be. Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. When you came to faith in Christ, you received the Holy Spirit in its full measure. There’s no adding to it and there’s no losing it, you are filled with the Spirit at the moment you put your faith in Christ for salvation. And the same power that enabled Peter to be so bold in our passage today is the same power that lives in us and gives us the strength and boldness to share the Gospel with those around us. God help us all.

Peter stresses that the deed that has been done is a "good" deed, the man was healed. But if you want to know who healed him, he continues in vs. 10, [Read] Remember this is the Jewish high court, the one that had condemned Christ to death, and Peter says, "You crucified him." What a difference the Holy Spirit makes in the life of a person. A few months earlier, this same Peter wasn’t even bold enough to say he even knew Jesus and now he is boldly

proclaiming him to a hostile court that could easily order his execution. He is bold and he preaches the truth come what may, no matter what it may cost him.

And he didn't stop there, Peter continues in vs. 11 by citing Psalm 118:22 which was read as our call to worship this morning. [Read] Peter points out here that by their rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, they fulfilled one of their own prophecies. Notice who it is that rejects this stone: it's the "builders!" Peter adds, "You are the builders". Who should have known a good stone when they saw one? The builders!

The word Peter uses here as "rejected" means "to despise." They were like stonemasons, who after examining a stone to build on, cast it aside and thought it was useless. They studied it and decided that it was the wrong shape and size. In the same way, they scrutinized Jesus. They saw his life and his miraculous works. They witnessed his power over demons. They heard his life-giving words. Yet, because Jesus did not fit the mold they had in mind for the Messiah, they rejected him. And Peter makes clear, the stone they rejected, despised, and thought useless turned out to be the cornerstone.

The cornerstone was the most important stone in a building. A stone examined for its size and shape would be strategically placed first so that the rest of the building might take its alignment and form. If it was off just a little bit, the whole building would be off and could come crashing down. The Bible makes it clear that the kingdom God is building is founded upon Jesus Christ. Every detail in its dimensions, shape, size, and form relates directly to Jesus. God has placed Christ as the cornerstone and now anyone who would come to God for salvation must build on Christ.

Which leads us to our third, and final, point, there is salvation in no one else but Jesus (v. 12). Jesus is the cornerstone. "There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved." Eternal life and eternal forgiveness is only available through Jesus. Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount in Matt 7:24-25, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock." And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 that this "rock" has a name, and his name is Jesus.

As, I shared last week, in Jewish thought the name of Jesus and the person of Jesus are inseparably linked. The name of Jesus embodies who he is. When the earliest Christians spoke the name of Jesus, they expressed their awareness that he was the Christ, the anointed Messiah, who embodied God's promised salvation. So, what does it mean that there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved? Simply, there is no other person who can save us. Only Jesus saves. This is the message that needs to be preached to our pluralistic age. There are not "many ways" or "many doors" to Heaven. There is one way, and one door and his name is Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

In our passage today, we saw that the Apostles were arrested, but not the Gospel. There was nothing the religious leaders could do to stop it. The church continued to grow and flourish despite the persecution. In spite of everything, Peter, already filled with the Holy Spirit, once again took the opportunity to boldly share the Gospel come what may, even if it meant his life. And his main message to the religious leaders that day, and the main message we have to share with others is the exclusive claim that there is salvation in no one else but Jesus. As Spirit filled believers, may we take the opportunities God sets before us and as we are going, let us be the Church on mission. Let's pray and prepare our hearts for communion.