



Message #9

“PETER AND JOHN ON TRIAL”

Acts 4:1-22

In the first three chapters of Acts we have seen how God blessed the early church with – great conversion growth, corporate prayer, unity and purpose, strong fellowship and miraculous signs and wonders. Now, at the commencement of Chapter 4, we see another dynamic come into play....**PERSECUTION!**

When has your faith in Jesus Christ ever been challenged by others? How? How did you respond?

The chapter opens with Peter having finished his “Temple Sermon” to the Jews who had witnessed, and were amazed by, the healing of the crippled beggar. Now they (Peter and John) are both sharing their faith with the crowd...until they are confronted by the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees and, ultimately, arrested.

The **captain of the temple guard** was the chief of the Temple police and second only in rank to the High Priest. He was responsible for maintaining order in the Temple grounds (obviously, Peter and John had disturbed the peace!).

The SADDUCEES:

They were one of 4 sects that made up first century Judaism, along with their arch-rivals the Pharisees, the Essenes and the Zealots. The Sadducees:

- Were small in number, but highly influential
- Were the dominant religious and political force in Israel
- Rejected the Resurrection (that’s why they were sad, you see!)
- Rejected any idea of future rewards or punishment
- Rejected the sovereignty of God, believing man was the master of his own destiny

The Sadducees were incensed that Peter and John were preaching the “risen Lord”, so they had them arrested, ready to be brought before the Sanhedrin the following day.

The SANHEDRIN:

- The ruling body of the Jews (like their “supreme court”)
- Patterned on the Court of Moses (see **Numbers 11:16-17**)
- Comprised of 70 members with a presiding chairman
- Membership was only possible for married Jewish men over 30
- Was made up of three main groups...rulers, elders, scribes (teachers of the law) (**Acts 4:5**)

The New Testament almost always depicts the Sanhedrin in a negative light:

- It was threatened by Jesus’ ministry (**John 11:47-53**)
- It engineered His death (**Matthew 26:59**)
- It attempted to bully His Church into silence (**Acts 4 and 5**)

Just a few weeks have passed since Anna and Caiaphas had been involved in the condemnation of Jesus. In his response to their question “By what power or what name did you do this?” Peter is forcing them to encounter Jesus again.

What does Peter say about Jesus (Acts 4:10-12)?

In what ways does the church confront the world with Jesus Christ today?

Acts 4 records the first outbreak of persecution against the church. After this it becomes a constant companion of Christians. Of the remaining 25 chapters of Acts, only 3 have no mention of, or reference to, some type of persecution. This should come as no surprise.

- Jesus warns His followers to expect to be persecuted. (John 15:18-20; Luke 21:12)
- Paul indicated it a certainty (2 Timothy 3:12)
- We should expect opposition and persecution and be ready to respond to it biblically.

Read James 1:1-2....Do you find it easy, or difficult, to respond with joy and peace when confronted with trials and opposition? Why?

Some KEY VERSES:

1. Acts 4:8...“then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit...”

This was the source of the BOLDNESS that Peter was able to speak and witness with. Likewise, it is only through the enabling and filling of the Holy Spirit in our lives that we will have a similar boldness.

See also: Luke 12:11-12; Ephesian 5:18; Colossians 3:16.

2. Acts 4:12...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

While the word “salvation” is precious to Christians, it was not a familiar Jewish theological term at the time. Instead, Jews associated words like *victory, freedom and justice* with the advent of the Messiah. But Peter wants the Jewish leadership to see that their ultimate need is salvation – deliverance from sin’s power and freedom from sin’s penalty.

See also: John 14:6

What does the name of Jesus mean to you, personally?

3. Acts 4:13... “....they (the Sanhedrin) were astonished and noted that these men (the disciples) had been with Jesus”.

The disciples were not changed by education, intelligence, experience, social standing, etc...they were changed because “they had been with Jesus”.

It is your proximity to Jesus, the closeness of your relationship with Him, that will make all the difference **in** the world...and **to** the world.

Do you think people see Jesus in you? How?

Are you willing to face persecution for your faith in Jesus Christ?

Some QUICK TAKEAWAYS for DISCUSSION

- Persecution of Christians for their faith is to be expected
- Persecution can also bring opportunities for witnessing (eg. Peter & John before the Sanhedrin)
- Each one of us can have significant influence for Christ in and through our lives
- We should not waste the opportunities we have to share the Gospel
- Others will be touched by and through our Spirit-led witnessing (a ripple-effect)
- We can stand firm and bold in our faith in Christ, enabled and filled by His Holy Spirit.
- The true church of Jesus Christ does not die because of persecution...it grows in spite of it!