

4.1-31 ACTS

4.1-4 Peter and John arrested

1. First outbreak of persecution! After seemingly idyllic start, and only awe, with nothing to offend (healing), suddenly opposition rears ugly head. This is surely because Peter, in his preaching, has exalted Christ by speaking of his mighty deeds and fulfilment of OT promises, and exaltation by God. Satan cannot endure this and must respond.

Must have been strong sense (for Peter and John) of repeat of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin.

Message

1. Nature of opposition
 - a. The powerful elite, who are threatened by God – and get annoyed.
 - b. They, like rulers generally, “assume that they control the instruments and symbols of authority and power, so they are shocked when power appears to be emanating from anyone else, esp. ones so beneath them as Peter and John” (Willimon). Thus their first question (cf. Jesus in Luke 20.1-2) naturally, is “by what power or by what name (i.e. authority) did you do this?” The “this” leaves the question open – is it the healing or the preaching in Jesus' name?
 - c. Self-interest. “Politically, they had ingratiated themselves with the Romans, and followed a policy of collaboration, so that they feared the subversive implications of the apostles' teaching.” (Stott)
In order that word may spread no further, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name. **i.e. they resort to damage control, instead of repenting. In doing so, they seek to deprive the people of salvation!**
 - d. Doctrinal (tied to self-interest and this-worldliness).
“Theologically, they believed the Messianic age had begun in the Maccabean period; so they were not looking for a Messiah... They also denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.” (Stott)
Jesus as the hope/source of resurrection. What consternation for the Sadducees: not a theological debate/reasoning about whether there is a resurrection, but the bald and bold claim that Jesus had risen, bodily. End of speculation: it's a reality, “an established truth” (Clements).

- e. Not worried about the facts/real issue. Offence ignores/dismisses facts, which are that a good and miraculous deed has been done in the name of Jesus. When Jesus offends... need for silence. Cannot deny the miraculous sign, and everyone knows, that a notable sign has been performed through them. **But won't acknowledge it either!**
 - f. Afraid of people – only thing restraining them. Ruthlessness v's cowardice. "After all, the establishment must *appear* to exist for the benefit of the people" (Willimon).
2. The character of the apostles "full of the Spirit" (; 21.12ff opportunity to witness)
- a. Bold. Their concern was not their own defence but proclaiming the risen Jesus.
 - b. Driven. They *cannot* but tell of the things they have witnessed (cf. Amos 3.8b), particularly Jesus' resurrection (v.20). Importance of a *confessing* church – see too Rom 10.9f. "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."
 - c. Evidently had "been with" Jesus, i.e. display same traits, incl. ability to perform signs and wonders.
NB. not country bumpkins though, but from artisan class – i.e. no slugs, though lacking formal education. What is significant is the contrast between the apostles and the rulers+scribes, in human terms.
Having been with Jesus = relevant to speaking and healing in his name – cf. 19.13-16 where the sons of Sceva are exposed as not knowing Jesus. The apostles have power in his name because they know him. Isn't simply a formula.
 - d. Feared God before man. He is the God of
 - i. creation
 - ii. revelation
 - iii. history
 They clearly express in prayer who they really fear – the sovereign Lord. The threats of the Sanhedrin are feeble compared with God.

- e. Astute/HS-inspired wisdom in their defence cf. Luke 12.11-13 HS will teach:

Focused on the facts – had done a good deed, but also answered questions honestly and openly

If being questioned re a good deed, healing of a crippled man...

“let all know (NB. ignorance is no longer an excuse) that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...

“Peter deflects attention from apostolic authority or miracle to the Christological meaning of this redemptive moment” (Wall)

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected (lit. ‘scorned’) by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone (Ps 118.22; cf. Luke 20.17). And there is salvation in no one else... no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Peter leaves it to them to answer their own question, there being no avoiding the correct answer and exposing their opposition to God. They must pass judgment on themselves. They are trying to keep the people ignorant of their means of salvation!

Had healed man beside them – Exhibit A - witness/undeniable proof!

- f. Wouldn't be silenced for no reason, esp. when contradicted their commission from God
- g. Interpreted opposition in the light of the Scriptures, seeing human authority for what it is (nothing compared to God's sovereignty, and to be ridiculed when arrogantly opposed to God), under God.
- h. Recognise dependence on the fellowship and prayer:
They report on their trial. “The report does not produce consternation but rather concentration in prayer” (Witherington)

The believers praise God for his sovereignty, quoting Psalm 2.1-2, mocking the power of human rulers and authorities which “do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” God has history in his hand.

They recognise that what is happening to the apostles is a repeat of what happened to Jesus (27-28)

They pray

- i. That God would consider them and enable them to speak his word with great boldness (not for deliverance from persecution)
 - ii. That God would stretch out his hand to heal, perform miraculous signs etc. i.e. not to destroy their enemies or even save them, but further demonstrate his own glory.
NB. The preaching is theirs, but it is God who does the miracles
- i. Continued to speak the word of God with boldness

3. God's response

Wall" God's response is immediate, dramatic and confirming"

The place is shaken.

- a. Portent: Shaking. Chrysostom: "that made them more unshaken"
- b. Power: All filled with the HS

Lessons:

1. The spread of the Gospel cannot/will not be stopped by force. Indeed, such efforts tend to backfire, resulting in further growth. Esp. relevant as the world attempts to silence the church. We too must pray for boldness and the mighty hand of God.
2. While nothing wrong with good education and training, it is the HS's presence and empowering which is the sine qua non of Christian leadership and ministry.
3. No room for religious pluralism – "no other name". While the mission is universal – salvation is for all people – its means is singular: faith in the name of Jesus.
4. Confidence in who God is, what he has done and will do, are the keys to boldness – along with believing prayer.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. In our NZ context, what do you see as the major ways the Christian voice is being marginalised, opposed or shut down – or threatened to be?
2. Where are the most significant threats coming from? Who are the 'powerful elites'?
3. What should be our response? To what extent should we be speaking up and lobbying for freedom of speech? If so, how might we best do that?

4. How do you respond when you find your own faith challenged, mocked or shut down? E.g. This may be in the context of family, or work, or when with non-Christian friends. Or do you simply keep silent about your faith to avoid conflict?
5. Are you recognised (by non-Christians) as “someone who has been with Jesus”? Has anyone ever remarked on this?
6. Who, in your Christian walk, has stood out as such a person? What is it that has particularly struck you about their witness?
7. How dependent do you feel on the body of Christ at WHCC? How often do you pray for the mission of the church, the leaders and particular ministries, and other members (other than your friends) in the parish prayer diary? Might you make a greater commitment in this area?
8. How are you going with praying for the one, two or three people you hope to bring to Christ this year (if you’ve made that commitment)? What opportunities has God given for conversations or invitations?
9. Pray for one another for boldness in witnessing, and that God might stretch out his hand and perform signs.