

Wherever the Gospel is Faithfully Preached...

Text: Acts 4:1-22

Introduction:

A forty year old man, who has been lame from birth, has been healed and made whole, through the Name and power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. As the man is leaping around and clinging to the Apostles John and Peter, in Solomon's Porch, people are flocking over to behold the wonder that has taken place, and to seek an explanation for it. Peter proclaims very boldly that this sign was done *by* and *in* the Name of Jesus, who the Jews delivered over to be crucified. After bringing the conviction of this reality to their hearts, he proclaims forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation with God, through this same Jesus. And now, as the Name of Jesus, and the Gospel have been boldly proclaimed, the authorities, who have just recently, unjustly, condemned this Jesus to death, are concerned about the proclamation of this same Jesus, as the Way of salvation. And so, they confront and arrest the Apostles, that they might be brought before the Sanhedrin, to be interrogated by the rulers of the Jews, concerning all that has just taken place.

This morning, our text takes us into this confrontation, brethren, and in doing so, we are reminded that "wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached," opposition will be found lurking about. Indeed, we ought never to see conflict in the church, as some unexpected reality, but rather, we ought to anticipate it, while being prepared to face it in a biblical way. For, the church that is never struck by conflict, probably preaches a false Gospel.

I. Opposition Arises

1) [Read verses 1-2]: A two-fold disturbance:

a- These are the ones who led the charge in wrongly accusing and condemning the Christ, calling for His crucifixion.

b- These are the ones who denied the resurrection of the dead, altogether (the Sadducees).

It would have taken a humility beyond comprehension, to own up to these two major wrongs, as leaders of the people. Here, James and John are preaching a resurrection from the dead (contrary to the conviction of the Sadducees), and not

merely a resurrection from the dead, but that Jesus of Nazareth (whom they led the charge in putting to death) was Himself raised from the dead! Needless to say, they were greatly disturbed and wished to put an immediate stop to this, even though a forty year old man, lame from birth, had been made well.

2) [Read verse 3-4]: The opposition put a halt on the preaching. Seeking to stop the bleeding, they arrested the Apostles and held them until the next day, since it was already evening.

Though they temporarily halted the preaching, the Word of God took its due, providential course, and many were converted, bringing the number of converts to about five thousand. They were taken into custody in the evening, indicating that they had been at the temple, speaking for some time (the hour of prayer was 3:00pm). And so, many who heard the Word, believed. Opposition came, but Christ's sheep heard His voice!

3) [Read verses 5-7]: The Sanhedrin; the highest court in Judaism (made up of the "rulers, elders, scribes and those belonging to the high priestly family"- *Johnson*), then convened the next day in order to interrogate the Apostles.

And so, they ask them the critical question, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" How will they respond? Will they hold back the truth, in fear of this politically powerful counsel; the same counsel that had just recently condemned the Christ to death? Will they replay the Garden scene, where, once the pressure was on, they ran away, and Peter denied His Lord, three times? Now, *they* were in the dock, and the Lord was not with them bodily.

4) [Read verse 8a]: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..." Now, without even reading further for a moment, brethren, we know that whatever follows, is going to be set in a foundation of boldness and truth. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit! At the Garden, Peter was full of *Peter*, and that is why his boldness failed him. But he has since been humbled; he has since come to see his desperate dependence upon Christ. He has since spent much time in prayer, alone, and with the brethren. And now, he is equipped to do the unnatural. And now, we will see a new Peter; a God-dependent Peter, in action. To be sure, he is still not perfect, but the Spirit will empower him with the boldness that he needs, to proclaim the truth before this counsel. We expect conviction; we expect clarity; we expect boldness, and we expect power. And that is what we will now find!

5) [Read verses 8-9]: Peter doesn't sugar coat anything here, does he? He gets right to the point, in a most powerful way. "Look, if we are on trial for a good that we have done for a helpless man; if we are being interrogated for the loving act of making a lame man well, then know this for certain..."

Peter here, draws their attention to the clear evidence that is set before them, namely, that not only has a crime *not* been committed, but furthermore, a man who has suffered with a debilitating ailment from birth, has been made wholly well. A man who has never experienced the joy and convenience of walking...for forty years, can now walk, like everyone else. This undeniable reality stands before them, and so, if they wish to know by what means this man has been made well...

6) [Read verse 10]: "This is undeniable reality; this sign; this miracle, is none other than a work of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Know this for certain; in fact, let all Israel know this for certain; let it be with the utmost clarity, so that there is no mistaking what is being said here, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; indeed, the very Jesus whom you unjustly crucified, and whom God has raised from the dead; it is by this Jesus, that this man, whom you know was a cripple, stands here before you whole!"

Again, Peter, filled with the Spirit, does not hide their guilt, or sugar coat the matter; he gets right to the heart of it all. "You guys made a huge and wicked mistake. You killed the Messiah, God's chosen One. But He has not remained dead; for God has raised Him up, and it is by His Name, indeed, by His power, that this man stands well, before you!" In fact, the Scriptures foretold beforehand the very wicked thing that you have done.

7) [Read verse 11]: "This Jesus, is the Stone, which you, the builders [the religious leaders and rulers over our people] have rejected; the very Stone, which has become the Chief Cornerstone of God's Holy Temple. He is the foundation of all true religion and hope; the main Stone, which both anchors, and sets the pattern for the entire building/tabernacle that is fashioned for the glory of God!" "And as such, there is no other way of salvation!"

8) [Read verse 12]: "There is salvation in no other; there is no other means; there is no other way; there is no other person, within which, salvation can ever be found!" [The power of His name, which healed, saves!]

Brethren, these are some of the clearest words, affirming the exclusivity of the Christian faith! There is no other way into the presence of God; there is no other way

of being reconciled to God; there is no other way of being joined to the tabernacle of God's people, apart from being united to the Cornerstone, The Lord Jesus Christ! But sadly, many, under pressure; many, who value their popularity more than their integrity before God, have caved on this issue, when standing in the limelight. "Are you saying that Jesus is the only way, and that such and such people, who do not know Him, will go to hell...etc?" "Well, I don't know, God will have to make that decision, or, maybe others will get in another way, but I believe in Jesus...etc." [My letter to George W. Bush, when he failed to answer this question in an interview with Charles Gibson---outside of envelope, this verse]