

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon July 3, 2022

Acts 4:13 – 22 – “We Cannot But Speak the Things Which We Have Seen and Heard”

5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, 6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." 18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.' 27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

I. Introduction

- a. Today's Sermon: Acts 4:13-22 "We Cannot but Speak the Things Which We Have Seen and Heard"
  - i. V13 – The Sanhedrin Marvels
  - ii. V14 – The Silencing Power of the Healed Man
  - iii. V15-17 – The Sanhedrin's Private Deliberation
  - iv. V18 – The Sanhedrin's Ruling
  - v. V19,20 – Peter and John Reply to the Sanhedrin
  - vi. V21a – The Sanhedrin's Response
  - vii. V21-22 – The Sanhedrin fear the people
  - viii. Questions to know, love and obey God

II. V13 – The Sanhedrin Marvels

- a. 13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.
  - i. The men of the Sanhedrin, accustomed to the effectiveness of their intimidation tactics, are surprised with Peter and John. No fear. No backing down. Clarity of speech and strength of argumentation. Courage even to indict the Sanhedrin for their part in crucifying Jesus.
  - ii. The Sanhedrin seeks to explain their courage and eloquence via education and/or social status, but Peter and John are uneducated and untrained. Finding no answer at first, they marvel.
  - iii. But, then, the body of the Sanhedrin realizes together that these two men had been with Jesus, and the Sanhedrin remember the courage and eloquence of Jesus and it all makes sense.
  - iv. "We are told what made their wonder in a great measure to cease: they *took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus*; they, themselves, it is probable, had seen them with him in the temple, and now recollected that they had seen them; or some of their servants or those about them informed them of it, for they would not be thought themselves to have taken notice of such inferior people. But when they understood that *they had been with Jesus*, had been conversant with him, attendant on him, and trained up under him, they knew what to impute their boldness to; nay, their boldness in divine things was enough to show with whom they had had their education."<sup>1</sup>
  - v. We discussed this in last week's sermon, but it's worth repeating. ***Does your life cause others to ponder how you could be so bold and humble? Have you been with Jesus?***
    - 1. "Note, Those that *have been with Jesus*, in converse and communion with him, have been attending on his word, praying in his name, and celebrating the memorials of his death and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2077.

resurrection, should conduct themselves, in every thing, so that those who converse with them may *take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus*; and this makes them so holy, and heavenly, and spiritual, and cheerful; this has raised them so much above this world, and filled them with another. One may know that they have been in the mount by the shining of their faces.”<sup>2</sup>

### III. V14 – The Silencing Power of the Healed Man

- a. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.
- b. Motivated by maintaining power, the Sanhedrin would have gladly suppressed the reality of this healing if they could. They desired to suppress it or twist it, but it's too late. Remember their response to Christ's resurrection:
  - i. Mt 28:11-15 “Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. 12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 saying, 'Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' 14 "And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." 15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” (Matthew written cAD40)
    1. The key leaders (chief priests and elders) of the Sanhedrin had assembled and consulted together about the resurrection report. This is intentional deceit concocted by rulers to mislead the people, about 2 months earlier. And, note the collusion between the Jews and the Roman governor at that time.
    2. ***What level of trust should you grant to non-Christian leaders of a corrupt civil or church government?***
- c. But, the healed man stood in their midst. They can't concoct a deceitful cover story this time. They can't bribe their way out of this difficulty. As a result, their council's inquisition is stalled at this point. “they could say nothing against it”
  - i. “The speechless perplexity of the Jewish leaders is a fulfillment of what Jesus had promised his followers when he said, “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict (ἀντεπεῖν)” (Luke 21:15).”<sup>3</sup>

### IV. V15-17 – The Sanhedrin's Private Deliberation

- a. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For,

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2077.

<sup>3</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [\*Acts\*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:14.

indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

- b. "But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves"
  - i. Why did the Sanhedrin desire to deliberate privately? If we didn't know the content of their private exchange, we'd be left to speculation. But, as their exchange shows, they wanted private deliberation in order to hide their goal: preventing the spread of the Gospel.
    - 1. "The designs of Christ's enemies are carried on in close factions, and they dig deep, as if they would hide their counsels from the Lord."<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. "conferred" – this was probably a lengthy discussion
    - 1. "The imperfect of the verb translated as "conferred" (συνέβαλλον) suggests that their deliberations lasted an extended period of time."<sup>5</sup>
- c. "What shall we do to these men?"
  - i. The Sanhedrin confers together over this question, considering their options. This is a serious matter. They sense this movement as a threat to the stability of their wealth and power. Their action will be expressed in some form of ruling toward Peter and John. Clearly, the Sanhedrin has ignored Peter's claim about Christ's resurrection, even though many of these same councilmen had participated in lying about Christ's resurrection. **Note the power of self-deception.**
    - 1. "If they had taken Peter and John seriously, they would have had to ask the question, "What shall we do?" Their concerns are entirely pragmatic, thus they ask the question, "What shall we do with these people?"<sup>6</sup>
  - ii. Because they will not consider the possibility of Jesus as their Messiah, they miss the honor God has placed upon the two men in their midst, two of Christ's apostles, two of the closest friends their Messiah enjoyed as He walked this earth.
    - 1. "If they would have yielded to the convincing commanding power of truth, it had been easy to say what they should do to these men. They should have placed them at the head of their council, and received their doctrine, and been baptized by them in the

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2077.

<sup>5</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [\*Acts\*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:15.

<sup>6</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [\*Acts\*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:16.

name of the Lord Jesus, and joined in fellowship with them. But, when men will not be persuaded to do what they should do, it is no marvel that they are ever and anon at a loss what to do.”<sup>7</sup>

- d. “For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.”
  - i. Again, Luke emphasizes what the council wished they could do. They would love to deny it happened. They are clearly willing to carry out intentional deceit in order to advance their goals.
    - 1. “There is a sense of helplessness and anxiety, but the leadership will still seek to counter what has taken place. Due to their rejection of God they fail to see and appreciate what has been done. This rejection, however, has begun to fall on hard times because such miraculous acts are difficult to deny”<sup>8</sup>
    - 2. ***Again, do you see that calculated, intentional deceit is just another useful tool that the self-deceived will use to shamelessly further their goals? Especially if they feel threatened.***
- e. “But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.”
  - i. Motive: to stop the spread of the Gospel amongst the people. To prohibit the Name of Jesus is to be anti-Christ. This council has here publicly, on the record, set itself against God, the One Who called Abraham, Who wondrously saved them out of Egypt and brought them as a people into the land they now poisoned with their lies.
    - 1. “All their care is that the doctrine of Christ *spread no further among the people*; as if that healing institution were a plague begun, the contagion of which must be stopped. See how the malice of hell fights against the counsels of heaven; God will have the knowledge of Christ to spread all the world over, but the chief priests would have it spread no further, which he that sits in heaven laughs at.”<sup>9</sup>
  - ii. Tool: Fear. “Let us severely threaten them.”
    - 1. “the [word] here used implies a very sore and heavy threatening, as of the most grievous punishment upon the most heinous fact.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2077.

<sup>8</sup> Darrell L. Bock, [\*Acts\*](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 197.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2077.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Poole, [\*Annotations upon the Holy Bible\*](#), vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 396.

- iii. Note the abuse of power by the Sanhedrin. They convict Peter and John of nothing. They do not continue an investigation into their actions. They resort to the use of power untethered from truth, aiming to achieve terror in order to silence God’s people. The Sanhedrin wants the terror of their potential punishments to close the mouths of God’s people.
      - 1. “Here may we see what a deadly evil power void of the fear of God is. For when that religion and reverence which ought doth not reign, the more holy the place is which a man doth possess, the more boldly doth he rage.”<sup>11</sup>
- V. V18 – The Sanhedrin’s Ruling Announced
  - a. 18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.
    - i. This is a total ban on speaking about Jesus. Tell no one anywhere, ever.
      - 1. “Peter and John are put under an absolute ban on speaking in a twofold sense. First, they are “never” (τὸ καθόλου) allowed to speak to people about Jesus. They are entirely forbidden to speak to anyone about Jesus, under any circumstances. Second, the ban concerns both “speaking” (μὴ φθέγγεσθαι) and “teaching” (μηδὲ διδάσκειν). The Sanhedrin prohibits both the public proclamation about Jesus as well as the regular explanation of the significance of his resurrection. Jesus and his resurrection are to be hushed up.”<sup>12</sup>
    - ii. This commandment is almost perfectly contrary to what Jesus had commanded them after His resurrection. Tell everyone, everywhere:
      - 1. Lk 24:46-48 “Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.”
    - iii. No justification whatsoever for their ruling
      - 1. “We do not find that they give them any reason why the doctrine of Christ must be suppressed; they cannot say it is false or dangerous, or of any ill tendency, and they are ashamed to own the true reason, that it testifies against their hypocrisy and wickedness, and shocks their tyranny. But, ... — *They can assign no reason but their will.* ...There is not a greater service done to the

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<sup>11</sup> John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 176.

<sup>12</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:18.

devil's kingdom than the silencing of faithful ministers; and putting those under a bushel that are the lights of the world."<sup>13</sup>

VI. V19,20 – Peter and John Reply to the Sanhedrin

a. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

i. Instead of an initial outright statement refusing obedience to the council, first Peter and John lay out a reasonable question challenging the ruling. In this question, the apostles clearly and courageously state that the Sanhedrin is placing itself in conflict God.

1. "This statement implies that Peter and John believe that the Sanhedrin should accept the conclusion that God must be obeyed, that they have been commissioned by God to speak to other people about Jesus, that they cannot possibly accept the ban on speaking that has just been imposed, and that the prohibition to speak about Jesus opposes the will of God. As a principle, every devout Jew acknowledges the statement that in cases where there is a conflict between the will of God and the wishes of human beings, God must be obeyed rather than human beings. This principle was known both in the biblical and Jewish tradition as well as among pagans.<sup>1152</sup> The apostles force the council members into the role of being judges against themselves."<sup>14</sup>

ii. Then, with their next statement, the apostles place themselves on God's side by stating clearly that they will obey God. Indeed, they have no other choice.

1. "we cannot but speak"

a. "The second argument is formulated as an explicit rejection of the Sanhedrin's decision. Peter and John insist that they have no other option but to speak about "what we have seen and heard." The double negative, translated literally as "we cannot ... not speak" (οὐ δυνάμεθα ... μὴ λαλεῖν) has the force of a strong affirmative: the apostles *must* speak about Jesus."<sup>15</sup>

2. "the things which we have seen and heard"

a. The disciples walked with Jesus and observed His glory, His goodness, and His power. They saw the empty tomb and His resurrected Body, and they saw Him ascend into

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2077–2078.

<sup>14</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [\*Acts\*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:19.

<sup>15</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [\*Acts\*](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:20.

heaven. They heard His Divine teaching and commands. They had been with Jesus, and their love and gratitude toward Him controls their lives, compelling them to go on loving others by spreading the Gospel.

- b. “The reality of Jesus, the meaning of his life and teaching, and the significance of his death, resurrection and exaltation must not be hushed up. They cannot allow themselves to be silenced as a result of a gag order issued by human beings, when the exalted Jesus, who sits on David’s eternal throne at God’s right hand, had bestowed upon them God’s Spirit, in whose power they speak and teach.”<sup>16</sup>

- iii. Question: ***Does this kind of loving boldness characterize your life, or do the world’s threats successfully silence you?***

VII. V21a – The Sanhedrin’s Response

- a. 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them,
  - i. “further threaten” – “This surely includes informing the apostles of the social and legal consequences of their disobedience to the council”<sup>17</sup>
  - ii. In response to the apostles’ convicting question and clear statement that they will obey God instead of the Sanhedrin’s lawless ruling, the Sanhedrin goes on in its stubborn sin. If the apostles’ reply offers another opportunity to repent, then the Sanhedrin, like their fathers in the wilderness, harden their hearts once again and go on with further threatenings. Even though they let Peter and John go free, they do so with angry reluctance, wishing instead that they had found some way to actually punish them. Surely, the halls of hell raged against the restraint required by the structure of Jewish law and the people who glorified God for the healing.

VIII. V21-22 – The Sanhedrin fear the people

- a. because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.
  - i. The Sanhedrin are controlled by fear of the people. The Lord has caused quite a stir amongst the people in Jerusalem. They are all glorifying God because of this great miracle performed on a man born lame, who had suffered for 40 long years before he was healed.
    - 1. ***Note, those who are controlled by fear will also use fear as a form of manipulation and control.***

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<sup>16</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, [Acts](#), Expanded Digital Edition., Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Ac 4:20.

<sup>17</sup> Darrell L. Bock, [Acts](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 199.



- ii. Fear of the people is a God-ordained balancing force in society, against all forms of tyrannical government.
  - 1. “As rulers by the ordinance of God are made a terror and restraint to wicked people, so people are sometimes by the providence of God made a terror and restraint to wicked rulers.”<sup>18</sup>
- iii. A Biblically-minded Christian people will always be a threat to the evil desires of rulers who set themselves against God. The people of God should be known for ending the political careers of those who set themselves against the Lord, and as though who obey God when men command otherwise.
  - 1. “If it so happen they abuse their honor, the Spirit declares there, as in a glass, what small account we ought to make of their decrees and commandments. The authority of the pastors [and civil rulers] hath certain bounds appointed which they may not pass. And if they dare be so bold, we may lawfully refuse to obey them; for if we should, it were in us great wickedness”<sup>19</sup>

IX. Questions to know, love and obey God

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<sup>18</sup> Matthew Henry, [\*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume\*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2078.

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, [\*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles\*](#), vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 177.