

Scripture Reading:

Acts 4: “1 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.”

"Sheep & Goats at the Temple"

In Acts chapter three we saw a great miracle performed as a man lame from birth was healed and able to walk and leap and praise God! This drew a large crowd and Peter took the opportunity to preach the Good News to those who had murdered the Author of Life. This morning we begin chapter four where we see the reaction the preaching of this sermon brings...

We see both the sheep and the goats:

- Those who hear and believe
- Those who hear and harden

As we concluded last week's message we turned to what the Apostle Paul told the church at Corinth about this great truth...

II Corinthians 2:14 “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. *[we serve & live as ambassadors for Jesus]* “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved AND among those who are perishing.” *[both the saved and the lost hear and see Jesus in our lives!]* 16 “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, & to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”

C.S. Lewis believed that everyone who ends up in heaven will look back at everything that happened in their lives as a step toward that end. Mr. Lewis also believed those who end up in hell will also see everything that happened in their lives as a step toward final judgment as well.

A great miracle has drawn a large crowd and Peter has preached the Gospel, spreading the fragrance of Christ right there in the Temple:

- The reaction is exactly what Paul described & it is the reaction that we see down through all of history when the Gospel is given...
- When God pronounced the curse on Satan in the garden He said that HE would place enmity between his seed and the seed of the woman.

This pictures the great victory of Jesus at the Cross where He crushed the head of Satan as he was only able to bruise the Savior's heel. It also explains the struggle we see in all of human history between those who are in Christ and those who are not...

- The saved and the unsaved
- The chosen and the lost
- The sheep and the goats!

In our text this morning, the first thing that we see is the reaction from the goats...

It says that the priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon Peter and John while they were speaking: There is a swift response from the enemies of Jesus... They had just witnessed thousands of souls saved at Pentecost and they did not want a repeat of that day!

- **Once again the Apostles were proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection of the dead and the Sadducees had to put a stop to this quickly.**

The priests and the Temple guard were responsible for protecting the Temple so they may have just been doing their job, but were accountable none the less.

It was the Sadducees who were truly goats with hardened hearts:

- **It could be argued that the Sadducees were the materialists of that day...**
- **You might say, how can you say that when they were religious leaders??**

They were leaders, and influential leaders, but what did they believe?

They rejected the resurrection and did not believe in ANY afterlife...

They might have been caught humming John Lennon's famous song Imagine...

**Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...**

This has been a powerful theme song for the materialists of today and it also reflects what the Sadducees believed... They just added some religious trappings, which we see many materialists doing today as well. They have another similarity to today's materialists:

- **They were small in number and yet had powerful positions, like that of the High Priest!**

Our evolutionary priests of today do the same thing: A recent survey showed about 78% of Americans believe that God created the world

- **That is NOT reflected in our schools, not reflected in the media and certainly not in science!**

IF anyone in those fields dares mention God's name or His influence they have the thought police of today "come upon them swiftly!"

- **They don't throw folks in jail, yet, but if the trend toward hate crimes continues that day may not be far off**

So it should not surprise us that the Sadducees take swift action, putting Peter and John in custody for a morning trial which we will consider next week.

- **In the same way it should not surprise us to see the materialists of today try and shut us up as quickly as possible!**
- **Again, we must we must remember the lesson of last week, taking opportunities to proclaim the Good News & doing so boldly!**
- **This is the task of the Church! To fail to present the Gospel or to try and avoid the conflict it can bring is to fail miserably in this task.**

Wilbur Smith whose book *Therefore Stand* was used mightily by the Lord in my own conversion had an entire chapter on the task of the church: It is a powerful chapter and the quotes he uses from the past demonstrate that this is not a new problem in the Church!

One quote is from Dr. Robert Wilson who said in 1922:

“What we need in the Church today are more men that are able to follow the critics into their lair, [and] slaughter them in their den. It makes me sad to hear these old ministers of the Gospel and Christians lament all the time about the attacks being made here and there upon the Bible, and they never do one thing to train the men to fight their battles for them... I tell you, the day is a hand when the Church, instead of cowering and seeming, as many so-called Christians do, to rejoice in the supposed victories over the Bible truth, will demand that anyone who attacks the Bible will produce the evidence!”

Wilbur Smith goes on to quote Dr. J. Gresham Machen from a journal article written in 1940:

“There are, indeed, those who tell us that no defense of the faith is necessary. ‘The Bible needs no defense’ they say. ‘let us not be forever defending Christianity, but instead let us go forth joyously to propagate Christianity.’ But I have observed one curious fact – when men talk thus about propagating Christianity without defending it, the thing that they are propagating is pretty sure not to be Christianity at all. They are propagating an anti-intellectualistic, non-doctrinal modernism; and the reason why it requires no defense is simply that it is so completely in accord with the current of the age. It causes no more disturbance than does a chip that floats downward with a stream. In order to be an adherent of it, a man does not need to resist anything at all; he needs only to drift, and automatically his modernism will be of the most approved and popular kind. One thing needs always to be remembered in the Christian Church – true Christianity, now as always, is radically contrary to the natural man, and it cannot possibly be maintained without a constant struggle. A chip that floats downwards with the current is always at peace; but around every rock the waters foam and rage. Show me a professing Christian of whom all men speak well, and I will show you a man who is probably unfaithful to his Lord.”

- **If we are not seeing people react to us with repentance or rejection, then we too are simply going with the flow.**

Luke immediately follows the reaction of the Sadducees and arrest of John and Peter with some astounding news about the sheep!

“However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.”

Three thousand souls were saved at Pentecost. At the end of chapter two Luke tells us that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Many now believe after hearing Peter’s call to repentance and Luke tells us that the Church now has 5,000 men plus women & children!

What we see here in Acts 4 as well as many other places in Luke’s orderly account, are examples of the reactions to the Gospel by the sheep and the goats.

This is the great division that the Gospel brings but from our human perspective it is not always clear...

We will see in a few weeks when Stephan becomes the first martyr in the early church that Saul of Tarsus sure looks like a goat!

We know that Judas was no sheep and yet He was a disciple of Jesus who went out doing miracles in His name...

This has troubled Saints and theologians down through the ages who want things to be simpler:

Someone once asked Charles Spurgeon why he preached the Gospel to vast crowds if only the elect were going to respond? He told the questioner that God had not painted a yellow strip down the backs of the elect, but if He had then he would preach only to them.

Jesus made it clear in one of His most stark parables that in this Kingdom age there would be weeds growing among the wheat...

- **The sheep would have goats among them!**
- **And sometimes we struggle to tell the difference**

We see troubled sheep on the one hand and happy goats on the other and wonder if God knows what He is doing!

- **Jesus knows this is the case...**
- **Jesus does not want us to be confused...**
- **He does not want us to depend on man or man's faithfulness...**
- **We are to trust in God and His faithfulness**

Those who are given the gift of faith will be those who bear fruit, some a little and some much. Those who are not given the gift of faith cannot produce any fruit no matter how they dress up their lives and professions. Jesus helped His disciples, and all of us, to better understand this by using one of His usual farming illustrations in what is arguably His most famous and most important parable.

The parable of the sower is given by Matthew, Mark and Luke where Jesus said,

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”

The disciples ask the Master what the parable means and Jesus explains that it is teaching us about the various reactions we will see to the Gospel:

- **We must see there are only two major groups and NOT four...**
- **Those who produce fruit and those who do not...**

“[Jesus] said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? *[I think Jesus makes it pretty clear that this is important for us to understand!]*

14 “The sower sows the word. *[same Gospel is preached to ALL]*

15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. 16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. 18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Note: Three different pictures of being Unfruitful!

20 "But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

- **Jesus contrasts three types who bear no fruit with three types who bear different levels of fruit!**
- **This is what we see here at the Temple...**
- **Those who are lost and those who are saved**

Satan moves in quickly to snatch Peter and John away, hoping to take the Word away from those who heard:

Some who heard will respond with joy but not with true faith...

The cares of this world will soon overcome and choke out this joy

Or when the coming persecutions take place there will be those who will not in the depth of their own faith find the strength to persevere.

- **These are the goats and in their hearts they know they are goats, just as Judas did all along.**

Yes, he did those miracles and sat at the feet of Jesus... but at the same time he stole from the purse.

Yes, he was there at the first Lord's Supper, but the bread did not bring peace and joy, but rather tension and judgment.

Judas needed to repent but in his own strength he could not, and even when he saw the error of his betrayal he still took things into his own hands, taking his own life.

We must remember that not all goats act the same:

- **Some never have any real contact with the Word or the Church**
- **Some hear for a time and then get busy with other things**
- **Some hear & get excited only to run for cover when things get tough**

None of these are those who are saved and then lost...

They were never among the elect who are given the gift of saving faith:

- **Or else they would have responded to God's Word**
- **They would have confessed their sins and returned to serving the Lord as the disciples did after they abandoned Jesus on the night of His betrayal**
- **And finally they would have stood firm in the face of persecution and tough times as we will see often here in the Book of Acts.**

We must also remember that not all sheep are the same as well!

Some are converted early in life and live many years serving Jesus and bearing much fruit.

Some are converted late in life, like the thief on the cross and cannot bear much fruit in this life.

Some are raised in faithful covenant homes and received good instruction from a solid church

- **Thus they are able to bear much fruit in their Christian lives: What Paul describes as gold, silver and precious stones that are enhanced in the furnace of God's judgment.**

Others are raised in families that are not faithful or attend churches that are very weak in the doctrines of the faith

- **So they do not produce much fruit in their lives. Their lives are filled with things that Paul refers to as wood hay and stubble, which is burned away in the furnace of God's judgment, but they are saved!**

As Jesus said, we have sheep who produce fruit: Some thirty, some sixty and some one hundred fold!

- **The bottom line is that the sheep produce fruit and the goats do not!**

This leads to the question that has troubled individuals and the Church down through the ages...

- **How do I know if I am a sheep or a goat?**

As we have done with the Lord's Table, this has become a lot more complicated than it should be:

- **The call of the Gospel is simple: Repent and believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world and YOU!**

Jesus said the sheep hear His voice:

- **Have you heard the voice of the Great Shepherd?**

Then you are a sheep and Jesus promised that none of the sheep would be lost!

- **Jesus said if you love me keep my commandments:**

This is the evidence of the fruit we will see in the lives of the sheep

Fruit that Jesus says the goats do not have...

BUT wait, don't non-believers do good things?

Can't they be merciful, do kind things, even obey most of God's commandments?

- **Yes, they can, but they do not love Jesus and you cannot separate the two.**

Those who do not love Jesus, turning to Him for the forgiveness of sins are damned to die in those sins and face eternal wrath for them.

- **Both sheep and goats sin in this world, and only the sheep can know and have forgiveness; both now and forever.**

Those who do good things but have no use for Jesus will die in their sins.

Those who profess to know Jesus and don't produce any fruit will also die in their sins

- **BOTH are goats!**

If you have professed Jesus as your Savior and strive to live for Him then you are safe and secure in His hands!

All of us will fall into sin at times, some a little and some a lot, but in either case we can come to Jesus for forgiveness and know that we stand in His righteousness now and forever!

However, we must not be presumptuous:

Children, if you enjoy being a Christian here at church but have no use for honoring and obeying your mother and father at home: You should fear God and repent.

Young people, if you desire to have a godly marriage and children but see no problem with participating in various sexual sins before marriage: You should fear God and repent!

Men, if you put on a good front here at church and even at home, but you, like Judas, are skimming from the purse at your place of employment; You should fear God and repent!

**Ladies if you are outwardly submissive and diligent in your duties at home, but harbor a heart of bitterness against God for giving you such a failure for a husband or troubling children:
You should fear God and repent!**

Sinning is not the problem: Just consider how guilty this audience before Peter was having killed the very Savior God had sent to them!

Sheep and goats BOTH sin...

- **But only the sheep humbly come before God confessing those sins and knowing His assurance of forgiveness!**

-- IF you are not sure you are a sheep

-- IF you are not comforted when you hear the forgiveness of sins proclaimed in the service,

-- IF the Word of God does not seem alive & exciting to you as it is read or sung or taught in the worship service

-- Or if you do not experience the presence of Jesus when He feeds us here at His Table...

- **Then you need to heed the command that Peter gave to those covenant people who had gathered there at the Temple:**

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...”

John tells the Saints in his first letter that he writes so that their joy may be full...

In the first chapter John gives them a perfect summary of what we need to understand about the security we have in Jesus because we are His sheep: Let me close with these all too familiar and yet very comforting words of John:

I John 1:5 “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”