

~ACTS~

Lesson 16- The Bold Stance for Truth

We are continuing our way through chapter 4 in the Book of Acts, and we are learning about the right response to persecution because in chapter 4 we see Peter and John standing trial for teaching and proclaiming the Truth and they are being persecuted for the sake of the Name of Jesus. Remember this all started when Peter and John were entering the temple and through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Name of Jesus, a lame man from birth was healed. And this miraculous healing caused a stir. Many people came running over to see how this man was healed and Peter and John begin preaching the name of Jesus and giving glory to Him and it says in Acts 4:4 that “*many of those who heard the Word believed...*” But there were also those with a hard heart who rejected the Word, and they were greatly disturbed and arrested Peter and John and threw them in jail, Acts 4:1-3.

So we see two responses to the Word preached in the Name of Jesus: there were those who humbled their heart and those who hardened their heart. So after being arrested, the next day Peter and John stand trial before the Sanhedrin council. We can learn so much from Peter and John’s response to persecution. They didn’t respond with violence or retaliation, they didn’t compromise the Gospel, but instead they stood faithfully in the Truth proclaiming Jesus Christ and the exclusivity of His Name. That there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ and no other name by which we must be saved, Acts 4:12. That Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through Him, John 14:6. This is where we left off last week in verse 12. Let’s read our text for today, **Acts 4:13-31**.

Peter and John had a boldness to speak the Word of God, but this boldness didn’t come from them. This boldness came from the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice verse 8 says, *...Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said to them...* This boldness comes to those who spend their time with Jesus. Look at verse 13...

<p>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.</p>	<p><i>13 Θεωροῦντες δὲ τὴν τοῦ Πέτρου παρρησίαν καὶ Ἰωάννου, καὶ καταλαβόμενοι ὅτι ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοί εἰσι καὶ ἰδιῶται, ἐθαύμαζον, ἐπεγίνωσκόν τε αὐτοὺς ὅτι σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν.</i></p>
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This boldness came as a result of their complete trust and faith in Jesus Christ. The Sanhedrin couldn’t understand this. Luke says the religious rulers were gazing at Peter and John in amazement, marveling because **they were uneducated and untrained men**. They were Galileans who could interpret Scripture better than they could. They didn’t go to the rabbinical schools. They weren’t trained by the Pharisees. How could they speak like this? And then Luke says, **they realized that they had been with Jesus**. This is growing into Christ-likeness. Jesus said in John 8:31 - “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*” This is how we get to know Jesus. This is how we can become like Him... abide in Him and His Word, **Acts 6:2-4**. The Sanhedrin was amazed at their understanding and application of Scripture, but there was something else they were amazed by as well. Look at verse 14...

<p>14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.</p>	<p><i>14 τὸν δὲ ἄνθρωπον βλέποντες σὺν αὐτοῖς ἐστῶτα τὸν τεθεραπευμένον, οὐδὲν εἶχον ἀντειπεῖν.</i></p>
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They couldn’t refute the wisdom of Peter and John and they can’t refute the healing of this lame man who stands before them perfectly healed. And the answer to all this is Jesus! Jesus gave them this boldness and Jesus healed this man, and they can’t deny either one of them, Luke 21:15.

The Sanhedrin is so flustered that they decide they need a break to talk amongst themselves. So they command Peter and John and the healed beggar to go outside so they can have a private deliberation.

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.”

¹⁵ κελεύσαντες δὲ αὐτοὺς ἔξω τοῦ συνεδρίου ἀπελθεῖν, συνέβαλον πρὸς ἀλλήλους, ¹⁶ λέγοντες, Τί ποιήσομεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τούτοις; ὅτι μὲν γὰρ γνωστὸν σημεῖον γέγονε δι’ αὐτῶν, πᾶσι τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἰερουσαλήμ φανερόν, καὶ οὐ δυνάμεθα ἀρνήσασθαι. ¹⁷ ἀλλ’ ἵνα μὴ ἐπὶ πλείον διανεμηθῇ εἰς τὸν λαόν, ἀπειλῆ ἀπειλησώμεθα αὐτοῖς μηκέτι λαλεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ μηδενὶ ἀνθρώπων.

The religious leaders are so mad; they’re bewildered, amazed and worst of all... they are hard hearted. They know that what has happened is a notable miracle, verse 16. They can see that Jesus is at work in all this, but instead of humbling their heart and repenting, they harden their heart and willfully reject the Truth, Hebrews 10:26. So because they can’t deny or hide that this miracle has taken place, it’s **evident**, φανερός, **to all who dwell in Jerusalem**, they come up with a plan to try to stop the spreading of the Name. Verse 17... **let us severely threaten them**, ἀπειλῆ ἀπειλησώμεθα, Acts 9:1, **that from now on they speak to no man in this name**.

Now that they have come up with a plan, they call Peter and John back into the council...

18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

¹⁸ καὶ καλέσαντες αὐτούς, παρήγγειλαν αὐτοῖς τὸ καθόλου μὴ φθέγγεσθαι μηδὲ διδάσκειν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Notice it is the Name of Jesus that they are forbidding. Because there is power in the Name. It’s the Name that healed this man, it’s the Name that is giving them this boldness, and it’s the Name that gives Everlasting Life, so the enemy is trying as hard as he can to stop the spreading of this Name. This is now a decree from the Sanhedrin council, the supreme court of Jewish Law. To disobey a decree from the Supreme Court is a violation in the tallest order. And the decree from the supreme court in Jerusalem just made it illegal to speak in the Name of Jesus. This decree becomes the basis for all other persecutions against Christians. This is how Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul, had the authority to persecute the Church. Remember in Acts chapter 9, Saul received letters from the high priest to go to Damascus, **Acts 9:1-2**. It was this decree in Acts 4 that started this. This is just a conjecture but remember that Luke is writing the book of Acts as trial documents for Paul’s appeal to Cesar. And this may be one of the points Luke is making to Theophilus. That the Jews had no basis on their determination to make speaking in the Name of Jesus illegal. They didn’t have any other basis other than pride and greed to forbid the speaking in the Name of Jesus.

But with this decree, Peter and John and all Christians at that time, have a choice... do we obey God or man? The Jewish government is forbidding anyone to speak in the Name of Jesus, but remember what Jesus told them to do... **Go into all the world and preach the Gospel in My Name**, Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18. So who are you going to obey? Look at Peter and John’s response in verses 19-20...

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.”

¹⁹ ὁ δὲ Πέτρος καὶ Ἰωάννης ἀποκριθέντες πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἶπον, Εἰ δίκαιόν ἐστιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑμῶν ἀκούειν μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ Θεοῦ, κρίνατε. ²⁰ οὐ δυνάμεθα γὰρ ἡμεῖς, ἃ εἶδομεν καὶ ἠκούσαμεν, μὴ λαλεῖν.

Peter and John make the bold statement... If it is right to obey man more than God, you judge. Notice Peter and John throw the guilt of not hearing God back on them. In a brilliant way, led of the Holy Spirit, they respond with conviction saying, “We’re obeying and listening to God, but if you think it’s right to listen

to man more than God, you judge. But for us, we are going to obey God. We cannot - NOT speak the things we have seen and heard.”

As evil grows worse and worse, as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:13, we, as Christians in the world, will be faced with these same questions... do we obey God or man? We just recently had a taste of this from our own government and these threats are not going to stop. They are going to continue to increase, and as time goes on, and as evil grows worse and worse, the persecution against the Name will increase. But with God, the answer is easy, we always obey God. We respond with Righteousness and Truth. Look at verse 19 again. Peter and John say, “**Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.**” This word “right” is the word *δίκαιος*, Righteousness. Peter and John are choosing Righteousness. In all things we as Christians must choose Righteousness. “*Seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness...*, Matt 6:33.” John says in his first epistle that true Christians practice Righteousness, **1 John 2:29; 3:10**. This means we are in the habit of choosing and committing ourselves to that which is Righteous, namely Jesus Christ who is the Righteous One, the *δίκαιος*. This is what we do as Christians, we seek Him.

So when the government establishes laws that are in accordance with Righteousness, this creates order and structure, and this is a wonderful thing because we can obey God and the government at the same time. Civil authority keeps evil at bay concerning civil matters and it establishes civil order. This is why we have Romans 13... because this is the purpose of government, to create civil order. But the government should only be involved and have authority over the civil matters of life. They don't have authority over the Church because Jesus is the Head of the Church. So if the government decrees something contrary to God and His Righteousness, then we have no other choice but to obey God rather than man, Acts 5:29.

Peter made this clear in his first epistle, **1 Peter 2:13-14**. This is right, civil judgement, the punishment of evil and the praise of good is a right thing, it is a Righteous thing, but the problem lies when this is reversed and ruling authorities begin punishing those who do good and praising those who do evil. This is what we see in Acts 4 and unfortunately, this is what we are seeing today in America and the world in general. They are praising evil and punishing good. This is the debased mindset that Romans 1 speaks of, and we also see this in the OT, **Isaiah 5:20; Proverbs 17:15**. When the government and ruling authorities contradict the Righteousness of God and His Word, then we must always obey God and His Righteousness rather than man and their abominations.

In verse 20, Peter and John take the bold stance of Truth and Righteousness and they obey God rather than man and say, “**It is not possible for us to not speak about that which we have seen and heard.**” And in John's first epistle he tells us what they had seen and heard, **1 John 1:1-2**. Peter and John saw Eternal Life manifest to them, and now this life is working in and through them as they preach in the Name of Jesus, and it is not possible for them to stop. This reminds me of what Polycarp told the Roman officials when they tried to persuade him to reject Jesus Christ. He said, “For eighty and six years have I been His servant, and He has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Eusebius Ecclesiastical History Book IV, ch XIV This is what Peter and John are saying. Jesus has the Words of Life, it is not possible that we stop speaking in His Name.

The Jewish leaders can't refute the wisdom of Peter and John and so they respond with further threats...

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.

21 οἱ δὲ προσαπειλησάμενοι ἀπέλυσαν αὐτούς, μηδὲν εὐρίσκοντες τὸ πῶς κολάσωνται αὐτούς, διὰ τὸν λαόν, ὅτι πάντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν Θεὸν ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι.

22 ἐτῶν γὰρ ἦν πλειόνων τεσσαράκοντα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐφ' ὃν ἐγεγόνει τὸ σημεῖον τοῦτο τῆς ἰάσεως.

Remember back in Acts 2:47 Luke said the disciples were having favor with all the people. This favor has resulted in a type of protection from the persecutions of the Jewish leaders. If the Sanhedrin had it their way, they would have just killed the Apostles, but the Apostles had favor with the people of the city and these leaders are afraid of being attacked, **Acts 5:26**. The people were glorifying God for what had been done... verse 22 **For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed**. The evidence of this miracle could not be denied because everybody in Jerusalem knew about the lame beggar who sat daily at the temple gate. I mentioned this a few weeks ago, but I believe this is the reason why God healed this man at this time, because it gave God the most glory and this miracle could not be refuted. Peter and John are released from prison, verse 23...

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

23 Ἀπολυθέντες δὲ ἦλθον πρὸς τοὺς ἰδίους, καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν ὅσα πρὸς αὐτοὺς οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι εἶπον.

Peter and John were the only Apostles arrested so they head back home to the Brethren to tell them what had happened. This is Fellowship. This is why it is so important to have Fellowship when you are standing for Truth and Righteousness. Because our Brethren can help lift us up and encourage us to faithfully endure to the end. Peter and John tell them all that the Sanhedrin said and about the decree not to speak in the Name of Jesus, and look at the Apostles response. They don't run and hide. They stand strong together and pray for more boldness and miracles to take place.

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,

24 οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἤραν φωνὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ εἶπον, Δέσποτα, σὺ ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς.

After hearing the testimony of Peter and John, the disciples cry out to God. And notice how they refer to Him. They call Him **Lord**, but in the Greek this word is not *κύριος*, but *δεσπότης*. This is the English word Despot- one who holds absolute power. God is the Creator of the universe. He is the Great I AM, and His plan of Salvation will be done as He has determined before the foundation of the world. Notice how they are praying... **with one accord**. Again look at the unity of Fellowship among one another. This phrase "with one accord" is the word, *ὁμοθυμαδὸν*. Luke has used this word several times so far in the Book of Acts to describe their one-mindedness, Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46. This word literally means "to continue with a similar strong passion of like-mindedness." There is an intense unity among the Brethren and it is this Fellowship with God and each other that is enabling them to persevere through the persecutions. And they are trusting in God as the One with absolute power and authority. And they continue in prayer quoting Psalm 2...

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."

25 ὁ διὰ στόματος Δαβὶδ τοῦ παιδὸς σου εἰπὼν, Ἰνατί ἐφρύαξαν ἔθνη, καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά; 26 παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς, καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τοῦ Κυρίου, καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ.

The Apostles are quoting Psalm 2:1-2 word for word from the LXX. And this is a magnificent Psalm to know that God has a plan, and His plan will be accomplished exactly as He established it before the foundation of the world. He is the Despot, the absolute ruler, our sovereign God who knows the end from the beginning and He cannot be surprised. There is comfort in knowing that Jesus is King and that one day our enemies will be dealt with Righteously. This is why the Apostles lean on this Psalm specifically, because it promises victory and Righteous retribution over the enemy. Next week we will dive into Psalm 2 and compare the prayer they have with this Psalm.