

Acts of the Apostles

Week 5: Acts 4:1-31

Peter and John Arrested and Questioned (4:1-7)

- The healing of the man and Peter's sermon in chapter 3 created enough of a stir in the Temple courts to attract the attention of the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees (4:1).
 - o The captain of the temple ranked second behind the high priest and served as the chief of police.
 - o The Sadducees were a political group that drew from both the priesthood and laypersons. They denied the possibility of resurrection (Acts 23:8; Luke 20:27) and collaborated with Rome in order to solidify their own political power.
- The leaders toss Peter and John in jail for the night (4:3).
 - o The leaders are bothered by the disciples' message (4:2) and the fact that they continue to draw attention even after Jesus's crucifixion.
 - o Luke notes that the church had grown to about 5,000 believers (4:4).
- The chief priest and his entourage question Peter and John asking, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (4:7)
 - o Jesus was asked very similar questions by the same people (Luke 20:1-2).
 - o These religious leaders assume they were the only authorized spiritual authority for the people.

Peter Addresses the Leaders (4:8-12)

- Luke highlights that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit as he began to speak (4:8).
- Peter addresses the leaders as "Rulers and elders of the people."
- Peter sets up the absurdity of the situation by noting that they are being held to account for "an act of kindness." (4:9).
- Peter firmly states that it was by the name of Jesus that they healed the lame man.
- Peter identifies Jesus as
 - o The man they crucified, but who God raised from the dead.
 - o The stone the builders rejected but that has become the cornerstone of a new spiritual Temple (see Psalm 118:22).
 - o The only one who can save/heal us. The Greek word for salvation carries both the idea of salvation from sins and healing from physical diseases (same verb is used in both 4:9 and 4:12).
- Peter's words highlight the fact that Jesus's name carries the same power as the name of God (Psalms 20:1-7; 44:4-8; 54:1-7).
- Peter's sermon implies that those who are questioning him should repent and believe.

The Leaders Deliberate, Threaten, Then Release Peter and John (4:13-22)

- The leaders are taken aback by Peter and John's courage since they viewed them as "unschooled, ordinary men."
 - o Jesus once said, "I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict" (Luke 21:5).
 - o Apparently, the leaders had not made the connection that these were Jesus's disciples until Peter's explanation (4:13).
 - o The leaders' astonishment does not lead to heart change. They remain hardened against the most obvious signs of God's work.
- It's clear that they wanted to be able to punish the disciples, but they all recognize that they have nothing with which to charge them.
 - o Not only have they not done anything illegal, but they have also performed a miraculous act of kindness which cannot be denied.
 - o The healed man was standing there with them!
- Their desire to stop the disciples leads them to threaten the disciples and command them not to "speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (4:18, 21).
- Peter responds to the threats with a bold statement of God's sovereignty and the disciples' commitment to bear witness to what they "have seen and heard" (4:22).

The Believers Pray (4:23-31)

- Peter's boldness does not minimize the reality of the threats. Both Peter and the rest of the believers know that these are the same people who put Jesus to death.
- The church responds to these threats with prayer. Their prayers:
 - o Acknowledged God's sovereignty over all creation (4:24).
 - o Recalled the fact that the Scriptures predicted that earthly leaders would oppose the work of Christ (see Psalm 2).
 - o Trusted that nothing that happened to Jesus was outside God's plan, including the opposition he faced from earthly leaders (4:28).
 - o Asked God to "consider" the current leaders' threats (4:29).
 - o Asked God to enable the believers to speak God's word with boldness (4:29).
 - o Asked God to keep performing miracles and healings through the name of Jesus (4:30).
- After they finish praying, the building was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God boldly (4:31).
 - o The shaking of the building is a sign of God's presence (Exodus 19:18; Isaiah 6:4).
 - o Once more in Acts, the Spirit fills believers to equip them for the preaching of the word of God.

Sources

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I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980).