

Message Date: 06-28-20

Message Title: Acts Part Two, Week 3, No good deed goes unpunished

Recap of Acts chapter 3: The new community of Christ followers is months old. A man is healed, and the crowds are amazed. Peter gives his second speech, connecting Jesus as the fulfillment of everything God has been doing, going all the way back to the Abrahamic covenant. The man who had been healed was healed by faith in the name of Jesus, and the faith that comes through him.

- **AT THIS POINT, the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem have finally had enough. These are the same authorities that Peter has been declaring are responsible for Jesus death, and they are fed up. Something has to be done!**
- **This brings us to Acts 4, NEXT big step in Luke's story, as we see the beginning of resistance to this new community of Christ followers.**

† And so it begins... the usual suspects **READ ACTS 4:1-12**

- **Peter and John are arrested, jailed, and next day put on trial**
- **Here we are introduced to some new characters- the establishment. Who are these people, why do they resist what God is doing? Let's get to know them...**
 - Sadducees: Key sect of Judaism, counterpart to Pharisees. Aristocratic/nobility. More concerned with economic- material matters than theology. Denied resurrection as a concept. Reaction against Apostles wasn't theological, but fear Apostles would destabilize social and political status quo, threatening their power and standing with Romans. High Priest was from the Sadducees.
 - Priests: Chief priests over all temple functions. Sadducees.
 - Captain of the temple guard: Leader of temple police. Responsible for keeping peace, suppressing activity that would upset the Romans.
 - Rulers and Elders: Jerusalem civic leaders and senior priests. Heads of key families. Group most directly responsible for Jesus' death. Sadducees.
 - Scribes/ teachers of the law: Keepers and interpreters of Mosaic Law. Pharisee minority.
 - Annas is the previous High Priest 'Emeritus.' Caiaphas is the current High Priest, leader of the Sanhedrin, and Annas' son in law. John/Jonathan is the son of Annas and future high priest who would replace Caiaphas in A.D. 36.

These people represent makeup of the Sanhedrin, Judaism's Supreme Court and civic/religious authority. Jesus, and the gospel message proclaimed by the Apostles, represented a threat to their power, authority (granted by Romans), theology and tradition.

- **That's the cast! Peter has finished his speech, and as he and John continue to talk to crowd, the police show up. Temple police that is, accompanied by the chief priests- GREATLY DISTURBED.**

† Greatly disturbed

- **WHY?? What was it about this new movement of Jesus followers that so offended the authorities?**
- **BEFORE we go there, what is it about Christianity that offends people today?**
- **LOTS of discussion... trying to explain Christianity's decline in western culture. What is so offensive about Christianity in our world? Andy Stanley commented on this few years ago- something like "The reasons people resist Christianity are things Christians should resist"... by this he meant negative things associated with Christianity, often unfairly..**

- **Hypocrisy. Politicizing faith. Legalism, being judgmental, intolerance over people who are different. Prosperity Gospel... Self-appointed “Christian Leaders” who distort and malign what NT really teaches- Intellectual dishonesty and moral inconsistency.**
- **Now, intellectual dishonesty and moral inconsistency are hallmarks of our entire culture, but it is TRUE, where these things are present in the church, they ARE OFFENSIVE. This is NOT what NT life in Christ looks like!**
- **Hears the deal... to say that Christianity is offensive because some people are hypocrites, legalistic, and distort scripture, or even because of the very HONEST moral stances we may take... THIS IS TO COMPLETELY MISS the real offense of the Gospel.**
- **Reason NT is offensive today is the same thing that GREATLY DISTURBED Jewish leaders in that day**

Reality! From these first days in Jerusalem, through the history of Christianity, and up to this present day, the great offense of Christianity is the truth of Jesus' **RESURRECTION.**

Acts 4:2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

- **Much later in Acts, we will see Paul proclaim the reason he is on trial is because of HOPE of the resurrection**
 - **In 1st Corinthians 1:18,23... Paul says:**
- For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles*
- **What was Jesus' great crime that led to his arrest and crucifixion? Why did these same authorities decide that Jesus had to be killed? Wasn't just because he stomped all over their traditions and cultural taboos. IT WAS BECAUSE He claimed to be GOD, and He did things that ONLY GOD COULD DO.**
 - **This drove the religious rulers crazy because Jesus didn't fit into their narrative of who God was, and what God was supposed to do, which included their base of power and authority.**
 - **AND THE RESURRECTION AUTHENTICATED EVERYTHING that Jesus had said and done. And now, the apostles were unapologetically teaching the resurrection of Jesus every day.**
 - **THIS HAD TO STOP.**
 - **I'm going to come back to the offense of the resurrection, but one more thought here. Luke says that the apostles were proclaiming IN JESUS the resurrection of the dead...**
 - **They were teaching JESUS resurrection, but even more, that IN CHRIST we TOO have the hope of resurrection. WE TOO will experience resurrection!**
 - **IN other words, THE HOPE of salvation, the HOPE of eternity, didn't come from the temple, the law, or the work and authority of the priests... it COMES FROM THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION, which is found only through faith in Jesus Christ.**
 - **This was the message authorities could not tolerate!**
 - **BACK to today for a minute. For most people today, we don't look to a temple, or religious law to find the source of life we are looking for. Some do. Most people look to the many offerings around us... and we are surrounded by things, activities, people... saying 'THIS will change your life!' THIS will give you the fulfillment you desire, the peace you long for, the Identity and meaning you seek. SO MANY THINGS PROMISE to make us happy... AND YET, there is only one thing that truly satisfies, and it is the LIFE, HOPE, IDENTITY that comes from a true and growing union with Christ.**
 - **WE ASK... HOW could that be offensive? Reminds me of obscure movie from 1968, starring Mary Tyler Moore and Dom DeLuise. "What's so bad about feeling good".. Comedic story line revolves around a virus- originated with a Toucan- that instead of making people sick, it makes them happy, content, emotionally healthy. As the 'disease' spreads, the**

authorities realize that if everyone stops their bad behavior, the economy will collapse.... This hope, joy, freedom... This has to be stopped!

- It argues for the reality of fallen human condition that what God has provided to truly bring peace, hope, and freedom, is rejected and considered a threat.

† **AND SO** Persecution begins... Peter and John tossed in jail... what effect did this have on the people who heard their message? and the church **GREW**

Acts 4:3 They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

- Church- this is a truth that we see throughout the book of acts, and history of the church. Persecution of Christ's followers does not stop the work of Christ! The consistent fact about all Christian persecution throughout history is that it FAILS in its objective to shut down and silence the gospel.
- Text from friend... "shock and indignation" about evidence Facebook/Instagram censoring Christian postings. I wanted to quote Peter from Acts 3... "why does this surprise you?" OF COURSE the world is going to push against gospel. It has since day one! But in face of this, gospel has spread.
- NO ONE wants to face censorship, persecution, or injustice. As members of a just society, must be resisted in ALL their forms. But resistance against the gospel should not surprise us, nor should it be a source of anger or fear. (more on that later).

- OKAY... so P&J are thrown in Jail for the night... next morning they are hauled before Sanhedrin... and put on trial. BUT P&J are not afraid, and the question becomes..

† Just who is on trial here?

⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

- Easy to miss in English, but Sanhedrin's question isn't simple curiosity. The word "YOU" is at end of sentence, making this both accusing and insulting. Most literal sense is.. "What power or authority outside our council gave this right to YOU?"
- Sanhedrin's contempt is barely concealed. Remember, THEY are the religious authority. Who are these Galileans to be teaching without their permission, much less a powerful miracle? In these rulers' minds, doing anything in the name of God was their area/control and had authority to stop it.
- But Sanhedrin had another thing coming. Rather than behaving as passive, uneducated commoners, Peter and John show a courage that shocked the authorities, and this is a courage that will continue through our entire story.
- You see, the apostles had been expecting this- one of the reasons they act with such courage is what Jesus himself told them prior to the cross. In Luke 21:12-15, Jesus tells his followers...

Luke 21:12 "People... will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ And so you will bear testimony to me. ¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

- Luke tells us that Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit. I love the picture here... Peter has the memory of Christ words to them NOT TO worry or be afraid, and in this moment, he also has the very Spirit of Christ giving him the courage and words to speak!

- **Armed with the very power of God at work in him, Peter turns the table and puts the Sanhedrin on trial... He is respectful, but essentially says... “LET ME BE SURE I understand what you are asking...”**

8b... “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame... “Are you really so upset that a good work was done that benefited this person?” Touch of irony... “Is this really what you are so greatly disturbed about?” and IF WE are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

- **“What power did this? It is Jesus that healed this man. And if Jesus did this work, that means that he is alive, that he is God... and He is the one YOU rejected and killed!**
- **Peter is saying... “YES, I am guilty before you (of preaching about Jesus), but YOU are guilty before God. Guilty of rejecting His messiah, whom he raised from the dead.**
- **Then Peter seals the indictment by quoting from Psalm 118...**

¹¹ Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.”

- **The Sanhedrin knew this psalm, instantly knew what Peter was saying. They held themselves up as the protectors and mediators of God’s presence, and yet THE essential ingredient to know God’s presence- the cornerstone upon which the presence of God is built- is who they rejected.**
- **Tragic Irony! Psalm 118 describes God delivering His People from their enemies. When written, the enemies of God were the surrounding nations... but now, the enemies of God- his work- were the very people who claimed to be God’s representatives. THEM. BOOM.**
- **But Peter isn’t done. One more thing to say, and in one of the clearest of these statements in the New Testament, Peter tells us why...**

† Why the great offense (resurrection**) is so offensive**

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

- **Friends, this scripture is as emphatic as it is clear.**
- **If the resurrection of Christ is TRUE, if Christ is raised from the dead, then that means that Jesus is GOD. And if Jesus is God, then that means that he is not ONE AMONG MANY, but he is THE GOD, and there are NO OTHER GODS.**
- **And because there are NO OTHER GODS, there is no other source of HOPE, no other way to be made RIGHT WITH GOD apart from Christ himself.**
- **Back in verse 9, Peter says.. “if you are asking how man was HEALED... Word “Healed” literally means ‘made whole’, ‘delivered’ or ‘SAVED’.**
- **Peter’s point is that Jesus who SAVED this man from his PHYSICAL CONDITION is the ONLY ONE given to all of mankind- who may save us from our SPIRITUAL CONDITION.**
- **FRIENDS, to a world that wants everything to be equally true, Christianity is exclusive, and that is offensive.**
- **Exclusive in that the NT doesn’t claim to be a philosophy, a system of ethics, or just another set of religious teachings. It really doesn’t claim to be religion at all.**
- **THE NEW TESTAMENT, built upon the foundation of the OT, claims to be THE TRUTH. The ONLY truth about God, founded upon the Truth of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, and the only means of restoration to God.**

- **HEAR! It is absolutely a biblical ethic to respect, honor, even defend the freedom of all people to worship as they choose, and WHO they choose.**
- **But the NT does not grant any truth about God other than its own. As Jesus said himself, (John 14:6)... I AM the way, the truth, and the life... no one comes to the father except through me.**
- **Such a statement would be intolerable arrogance.... EXCEPT FOR ONE THING. THE CROSS. Where Jesus really died, and was raised from the dead, defeating death and opening the door to a NEW LIFE of hope and freedom.**
- **Paul said this in opening of Romans... we are NOT ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.**
- **And so the question before each of us TODAY is the same as it was before the people of Jerusalem THAT DAY. WILL WE BELIEVE? DO YOU?...**
- **Friend... if you know in your heart that you have never taken the step of faith to place your faith in Christ... it's not complicated. PROFOUND, it is SURRENDER, but simple.**
- **this is a step of believing Jesus is who he said he is, that he really rose from the dead, step of yielding your life to his, and receiving his life as your life.**
- **In Romans 10:9-10, God says this to us:**

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

- **In John 21:31, we see this...**

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- **If you have taken that step today, reach out to me.. another pastor, a Christian friend. You've taken the first step into eternity, and God will use other believers as you take the steps to follow.**

COMMUNION

- **As followers of Christ, communion is a powerful way God has taught us to remember the cross. To remember what Christ did so that we may have the opportunity to repent, turn to God, and enter into a life of his refreshment and restoration.**
- **Instruction- come to front, take cup, bread, move back to your seat, I'll lead us all together.**
- **PRAY... come to the table**
- **And so we remember, as described to us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11...**

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.