

Message Date: 07-05-20

Message Title: Acts Part Two, Week 4, Unschooled Ordinary Men

- ***Have you ever had to make a choice of who you will obey? Choice between two authorities, when those authorities conflict?***
- ***What if one loudly and emphatically tells you IT IS THE authority, and that there will be consequence if it is disobeyed... AND***
- ***The other is absolutely unapologetic about who it is, it's total authority, and yet it is quiet, calm, even gentle... but it also calls you to obedience.***
- ***WHO DO YOU OBEY?***

- ***For followers of Jesus, this question has special relevance, when we think of this choice being between the authority of men, and the authority of GOD.***

- ***Faced with such a choice, most of us would quickly say that we would obey God rather than men, and maybe we would.***

- ***But what if the question isn't so clear cut?***

- ***In Romans 13, Paul teaches us to obey our human authorities, and he uses some pretty clear and strong language in doing so.***

- ***Also, if we are honest, are we at times tempted to use God as cover, when we want to disobey an authority not so much because they are in conflict with God, but because they are asking me to do something I don't like! I'M THERE***

- ***But when it comes down to it, the authority that makes loudest demands for our obedience, that demands to be THE SOVERIEGN AUTHORITY in our lives.... AND that most of us have chosen over God many times... It's not the government. It's not any other person or institution at all.... IT IS OURSELF.***

- ***Specifically, it's our OLD self, the person we used to be, the old unregenerate person that was crucified with Christ, and no longer lives... But whose characteristics- like a spiritual zombie- refuses to be dead, and follows us around demanding to be put back in charge.***

- ***The bible calls this zombie our FLESH- the residual condition of our old dead self that desires its own wisdom, strength, and control.... AND ALL TO OFTEN, when facing the choice between our flesh (our own wisdom, strength, and control) and the Spirit of God within us, we choose our flesh.***

- ***SO, I'll ask again- for you and me, who is the authority we listen to? Who do we obey?***

- ***TODAY CONTINUING IN ACTS 4- Peter and John are standing before the highest authority of their people, and this authority is demanding to be obeyed. In response, Peter utters the famous question that still calls to us today. "What is right in God's eyes? To listen you you, or to listen to him?" Who should we obey?***
(IN SERMON TEXT HERE)
- ***WELCOME EVERYONE! Thank you for joining us! It is SUNDAY, JULY 5th, 2020, and in the mountains of Eagle County Colorado, THIS IS TRINITY ONLINE.***

- **LAST WEEK we saw Peter and John placed on trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, and Peter's response..**

Acts 4:8-12 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “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 and 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. ¹¹ Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” 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.”

- **NOW, Luke describes the response of the accusers. They saw the courage of Peter and John, and they were ASTONISHED.**

¹³ When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

- **Unschooled/ordinary. This doesn't mean P&J were illiterate. They could read and write, as their own New Testament letters attest.**
- **The word for 'unschooled' here has literal sense of 'lacking letters'... (in our day, BS, PHD)... in other words, they lacked a formal higher education, most specifically a formal religious education. Also has sense of lacking training or skill in public speaking.**
- **NOTHING ABOUT P&J that would cause this elite gathering to expect anything from them. And YET, very embarrassing for the Sanhedrin was the undeniable proof of Peter and John's work... the man who had been healed, standing there with them!**
- **Think of it! One of my commentaries made the observation that P&J are standing in front of the highest authority in Judaism, and make clear that WHO THEY ARE, WHAT they have said, and what they have done is from a source TOTALLY separate from the power and authority of the Sanhedrin.**
- **Luke tells us that the Sanhedrin recognized this, as they 'TOOK NOTE' that Peter and John had been with Jesus. Not only that, they were undeniably doing the same sorts of things that Jesus himself had done. EXHIBIT A, the man who had been healed.**

¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

- **This again recalls Jesus words to the disciples back in Luke 21- that when they would be brought up on trial before the authorities, that ... “I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”**
- **THE SANHEDRIN IS IN A DELIMMA. What do they do?**

¹⁵ So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

- **Church, here we see another OT prophecy being fulfilled, and it is the reality of SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS. Jesus himself spoke of this, when he quoted Isaiah, referring to the religious authorities of his day...**

Matthew 13: 14 *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’*

- **Think of what’s going on in the Sanhedrin’s mind...**
 - **Everyone knows P&J have done a ‘notable sign’- in other words, a MIRACLE. A sign from God. WE KNOW THEY HAVE.**
 - **We cannot deny that what has happened is a work, a sign of God... AND SO...**
 - **WE MUST STOP IT. Spiritual blindness**

- **BUT, before we get too hard on the Sanhedrin, we can share in this hardheartedness ourselves.**
- **Have you ever had a situation, maybe a condition, a behavior pattern, where you KNEW God was wanting to work, where God was calling you to the healing, life that comes from obedience to him... and yet your functional reply was “I know you are God, I know you are calling me to obedience... but I choose what I want. I choose my own wisdom.**

- **We may do this because of pride, fear, or just our desire to be in control**

- **YOU SEE, we may be sincere followers of Christ, but when we reject the clear will and hope of God for our own will and control, we are acting with the same hardheartedness that blinded these leaders so long ago. (will come back to this)**

- **BEFORE we continue in story, one more thing here. FFBRUCE points this out in his commentary... example of something very significant from what is NOT SAID.**

- **OKAY... remember, Peter, apostles, are pointing EVERYTHING that is happening to Jesus and His resurrection. Peter has just said “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.” Resurrection is foundation..**

- **SO, if you are the Sanhedrin, this would be the perfect time to play your ultimate trump card and shut this all down now. This is when you say “NO HE DIDN’T rise from the dead! We all watched him die on that cross, and the Roman guards watched your people put his body in the grave, and the tomb was sealed. HE IS DEAD, DEAL WITH IT!”**

- **OR, AT LEAST, you could have said... OK, so those worthless Roman guards fell asleep and some of you moved a multi-ton stone away from the tomb, without waking up the romans guards... and stole his body. Good one. BUT EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT PEOPLE DON’T RISE FROM THE DEAD! So why don’t you stop pinning this pathetic movement of yours on something that didn’t happen!**

- **BUT, they DIDN’T SAY THIS. I mean, the majority of the Sanhedrin were Sadducees, who as a core matter of their theology rejected the very notion of resurrection. WHY didn’t they say any of this?**

- **You know the answer! Because THEY COULDN’T. Because they, and everyone in Jerusalem, KNEW THAT JESUS HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD.**

- **SO, the Sanhedrin is in an impossible situation.**

- **Before them is the overwhelming evidence of Jesus' resurrection**
- **Before them is overwhelming evidence of holy spirits work on day of Pentecost, and clear work of God through daily life of the new community of Christ followers.**
- **STANDING RIGHT BEFORE THEM is the man who had been healed in Jesus name.**
- **Faced with this evidence, what would YOU do? Do you surrender to the clarity and goodness of what God is doing through Jesus, OR**
- **Do you push ALL OF THIS aside in order to protect your own tradition, power, and pride?**
- **The Sanhedrin chose the latter.**
- **But they are still in an impossible position.**
 - **If they deny the man was healed, they look like fools**
 - **If they punish Peter and John, the crowd may revolt against them- because at least at this point, the people of Jerusalem are still holding the believers in high esteem, and praising God for the healing of this man.**
 - **BUT, they also can't just let Peter and John go scot free, or they will reveal their powerlessness against what is happening.**
- **WHAT TO DO? Like most people protecting their turf, they go with threats and intimidation**

¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

- **The greek in v 17-18 is strong- it is a statement of blanket prohibition on their activity, made with the clear threat of retribution if disobeyed.**
- **These religious leaders, because of their hardheartedness, are seeking to erect a barrier between the work of God and the people under their leadership. This is a picture of what pride and hardheartedness does... it not only rejects God's work and goodness in a person's life, but it can influence others to do the same.**
- **This brings us back to where we started. FACED with the choice of which authority they will obey, Peter and John make their decision, and it's not even close.**

¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!"

²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

- **Interesting point- if you COULD have asked one of these religious rulers at another time to judge if a person should obey the power of men or the call of God, what would they have said? The instant response would have been 'GOD!'. But now, their spiritual blindness prevented them from realizing they were the very men in opposition to God.**
- **And so Peter and John proclaim, WE WILL LISTEN TO GOD. In doing so, they are also proclaiming that the Priests, authorities, and teachers of O.C. Law.. that these people and the system they represent NO LONGER REPRESENTS the work and authority of God.**
- **Here we see the God's limit on human authority. "When does God call us to disobey the human authorities over us?" It is when that authority directs us to deny or go against the will, the work, the nature, the love and goodness of God.**

²⁰As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

- ***We CANNOT HELP sharing about who Jesus is, and what he has done... it is an overflow from within us... because it is what we have EXPERIENCED ourselves.***
- ***Luke then finishes this part of the story.***

²¹ After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²² For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

- ***Powerful story, lot here to teach us. Wrap up with TWO more thoughts on how this speaks into our lives today.***
- ***First- this reality of Spiritual blindness. How do we respond to this? When you have a person who has heard the gospel, at least in simple form, and who has seen some evidence of the gospels authenticity. AND YET, there is no response. What about when this seems to be the response of an entire culture? Do we just give up?***
- ***In Acts, we will see how these early believers responded, starting next week. THEY PRAYED. They prayed, and they continued to follow God's work in their lives.***
- ***In Ephesians, we see Paul praying- actually for believers- that the EYES OF OUR HEARTS would be opened/enlightened- that we may know the hope to which God has called us, God's glory and power.***
- ***MUCH COULD BE SAID HERE, but In light of the spiritual blindness of people around us, and our own blindness at times, one takeaway is to PRAY. To pray for God to soften hearts, to open people's minds, and then to watch for the opportunities God will give us to love, to share what WE have seen and heard!***
- ***This leads to SECOND thought. In today's text, we saw that the Sanhedrin was astonished at Peter and John's courage, and they TOOK NOTE they had been with Jesus. Then at the end, Peter and John proclaimed that they couldn't help speak about what they had seen and heard.***
- ***BOTH OF THESE point to the great truth that when we are in a relationship with God... when we HAVE BEEN WITH JESUS- He will not leave us unchanged.***
- ***God is NOT a passive presence in our lives.. he is active.***
- ***Hebrews 4- Word of God is alive and active...***
- ***NOW, We have the choice whether or not we listen to God, if we have a heart that is open and surrendered, desiring to know Him and follow Him... we can choose to shut our spiritual ears and choose to follow our own will and control...***
- ***BUT, when we don't do that... when we choose to listen to God, and follow him... Then we enter into the experience of life Paul described in his second letter to the church in Corinth... 2 Corinthians 3:17-18....***

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

- *May it be our choice to listen to God. To be obedient to Him. And as we do, may the people in our lives take note at the transformation that inevitably will result when we have been with Jesus.*