

**When Religion Confronts Christianity**  
**Trusting Through Trials**  
(Acts 4: 23-35)

Communion Chapel

Aug. 9, 2020

**Intro**

A quick walk down “memory lane” in the book of Acts reminds us what God intended to do with and for His people now that Jesus was no longer among them.

1. Jesus ascended w/ a promise of divine power to proclaim resurrection message; selected Matthias to replace Judas (Chp. 1)
2. God was good for His promise and sent Holy Spirit on Pentecost; disciples spoke in many foreign languages the resurrection message; Peter preached a confirming sermon; 3,000 saved; “Church” was strong and unified (Chp. 2)
3. First recorded miracle was the complete & instantaneous healing of a lame beggar at the Temple; Peter preached his second sermon authenticating the message of the resurrection and the messengers who proclaimed it (Peter & John) (Chp.3)

Chapter four reveals the results of Peter’s sermon; 5,000 souls saved (v.4b) but the incident was not without controversy.

**I. The Confrontation (v.1-22)**

**A. Religion Reacts (v.1-4)** – Probably at the most crowded area of the Temple, at Solomon’s Porch near the Court of the Gentiles, Peter preached his sermon on the resurrection of Christ, in full view of the crowds and under the nose of the religious leaders. How did they react? Peter and John were silenced by being placed under arrest and taken away. **This was the first persecution of the Church.**

NOTE: Who are the Sadducees? (v1b) (Wm. Barclay’s notes p.37 DBS on Acts)[**read**]

**B. Religion Rebukes (v.5-12)** – “And it came about on the next day” ... I want you to imagine this scene of about 70 of the most powerful religious leaders of the nation of Israel, men of wealth and heritage and education, keepers of the nations traditions, their equivalent to our Supreme Court, place Peter and John and the healed beggar in the middle of a semi-circle (v.7a) (former high priest Annas -9 yrs. and current high priest Caiaphas [son.in.law]- 18 yrs.)(v.6) They asked the religious question ... “by what power or in what name have you done this?” (v.7b) and Peter gave a faith response ... **filled** with the Holy Spirit (v. 8-12) [NOT baptized in H.S.]

NOTE:

- Religion does not operate in the realm of the Spirit but usually through intimidation, threats and tradition
- Notice the courage it took for Peter to proclaim the gospel to this audience; the same group who tried Jesus and found Him worthy of death (“you” 3X in v.10)
- That courage clearly proclaimed that salvation/deliverance from sin and eternal judgment must only come from Jesus (v.12).

**C. Religion Recognizes (v.13-21a) –**

1. **Religion silenced** (v.13-14) – looking at the fact of the lamed beggar now standing before them; uneducated men speaking with boldness and eloquence about O.T. scriptures now place the Sanhedrin at the fork of faith; **to believe or not to believe.** Follow Jesus or follow religious system. (“you be the judges”) **They remained silent.**
2. **Religion unmoved** (v.15-21a) – “warned them ... commanded them ... threatened them” The Sanhedrin’s refusal to believe placed themselves and the nation of Israel on the path to spiritual destruction. **APPL>** a transformed life is our best witnessing tool and even then some will not believe and the religious may be the hardest to reach since they often trust in their own “goodness.”

**D. Religion Resigns (v.21b-22) – let Peter and John go by threatening them not to speak.**

**Slide Book of Acts graphic**

When we look back on the first half of **Acts 4** we come to understand that the proclamation of the gospel message has miraculous benefits (healing of lame man) but it also comes with a price (1st persecution -jailed)(v.3). What follows is also very instructional for us because we witness what Peter and John experienced could also be our experience. In fact Jesus spoke to such times in **Matt. 10:18-20** **slide**  
**Read** Appl > How will we respond in similar circumstances ?

**II. Threatened but not Shaken (v.23-35) a celebration**

A. **Prayer & Praise** (v.23-30) – after their ordeal Peter and John rejoined their support team, their Church family to report and celebrate the goodness and greatness of their God. The church family was immediately encouraged and energized and unified (*voices in one accord*) because of what God had done in their midst Their prayer was :

1. Spontaneous (voices - one accord)
2. Proclaimed the sovereignty of God - He makes and controls everything and everything has a purpose that is determined by God /predestined(v.24b - 28).
3. They prayed for their own boldness ( in Jesus' name)to proclaim as Peter and John had done (v.29-30).

B. **Divine Response** (v.31) – How did God respond to their requests? The building/ground shook and ALL were *filled* with Holy Spirit to proclaim gospel (cf. Acts 1:8 – power H.S. to witness)

**Q:** Would it be safe to say that the Lord answered and affirmed their prayers ? Is He communicating “I’ve got your back ? Therefore go forward and do not shrink back. Leave the dangers and the details to Me.

God’s response to the prayers of His people should shed some light on our own participation and expectation when coming into times of prayer ..

- When we face opposition our courage should crystallize
- Difficulties should deepen our determination
- Conflict should clarify our convictions **slide (cf. James 1:2-4)** producing endurance/complete

**Q:** So ... when difficult times do come (*let’s say a pandemic virus of some kind; or some form of persecution*) should we separate or come together?

**Slide Acts 4:32-33**

C. **Human Response** (v.32-35) – Having weathered their first persecution and experiencing the Lord’s affirmation, they moved outward to demonstrate this great transformation that was taking place in their midst. As a result the church was united ...

1. Spiritually - “one heart one soul”
2. Materially - meeting the needs of the many (koinonia – sharing in common)

Let’s keep in mind ... UNITY is about “**oneness**” Oneness in purpose; oneness in spirit. What unity is NOT is “sameness.”

**Slide Eph. 4:4-6**

### III. **Take-Aways** (lessons learned)

- A. **Be Tough** – varying forms of persecution will come our way; the question will always be “how do we respond?” in our obedience to the Lord; **don’t quit and don’t be quiet.**
- B. **Be True** – take a page from Peter and John, speak the truth in love (v.29)
- C. **Be Tender** – Christianity is a “give away “ process; it is not to be held on to but to be given away to other that they may share with others. The world around us still needs compassion and care; it needs to see and experience the love of Jesus through human agency; don’t make it into an “either /or” but a “both/and” lifestyle.