

9. In the Power and Name of Jesus Christ: Acts 4:1-31

In Acts 3, Peter through the power of God, had healed a man crippled from birth who lay at the gate called Beautiful. Amazement and excitement ran through the members of the Jewish community who were assembled at Solomon's Colonnade inside the temple walls. Peter preached his second sermon to these onlookers. Peter began his sermon by presenting the facts of the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and the fact that they were witness to these events. During his sermon in Acts 3:16, Peter established that it was in the name of Jesus that this miracle was accomplished: "16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see." This fact becomes the central question of chapter 4.

This same Jesus also required them to obey the gospel in Acts 3:19-20: "19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus." This command was identical to what he told his listeners on the Day of Pentecost Acts 2:38-39:

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Peter's sermon ended with the teaching in Acts 3:24-26 that all that they were witnessing was that which was promised by all the prophets:

24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

This is the context of the inquiries and persecutions that begin in Acts 4 and continue over the next several chapters

The Priests, the Temple Guard, and Sadducees Are Greatly Disturbed

Acts 4:1-4

4:1 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 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, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees were disturbed because the apostles were teaching that Jesus was raised from the dead. Sadducees were of the ruling class and flatly denied the resurrection of the dead. Webster defines them: "A member of a Jewish party of the intertestamental period consisting of a traditional ruling class of priests and rejecting doctrines not in the Law (as resurrection, retribution in a future life, and the existence of angels)." They seized Peter and John and put them in jail until the next day. However, many who heard believed and the number of men grew to about 5,000. The passage does not mention the women converts, which might have doubled their number. In the next

verse, the narrative follows the fate of these jailed apostles as these leaders of the Jews interrogate them.

“By What Power or What Name Did You Do This?”

Acts 4:5-7

5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

The next day, Peter and John were brought before the leaders—a cross section of rulers, elders, and teachers and many of the family of the high priest, Caiaphas. The question was about their authority to heal the crippled man: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Acts 4:8-11

8 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 cripple and are 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 He is

"the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone."

That Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit illustrates that he was speaking by the inspiration of God. Peter was later to write in 2 Peter 1:20-21 how scripture came into being

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The inspired and emphatic answer to their question addressed the issue as a fact: “Know this.” Peter proceeded to state, “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” He followed by indicting them with the facts: they crucified him; God raised him from the dead, and this man stands before you healed. Peter concludes this indictment by quoting Ps 118:22: “22 The stone the builders rejected/ which has become the capstone.”

There Is No Other Name under Heaven

Acts 4:12

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

Peter’s answer, “It is by the name of Jesus Christ . . .,” stands as a fundamental principle for those who believe that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings. However, in verse 12 that principle is reiterated in no uncertain terms: Salvation is in no one else; no other name under heaven is given; by the name of Jesus, we must be saved. In this single announcement, the authority of Jesus sounds forth for all ages. It echoes the statement of Christ, himself, when he said in Matt 28:18-20:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Not only does the name and authority of Jesus apply, excluding all others, when obeying his gospel, but it applies in every single thing the church does. Paul instructed us in Col 3:17, “17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” John also spoke of this unlimited power of the Lord in Rev 12:10:

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

"Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.

“Speak No Longer to Anyone in This Name”

Acts 4:13-14

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

When these leaders of the Jews heard Peter, they concluded that there was nothing that they could say against them because the miracle was obvious, with the man whom everyone knew standing right there. The lesson for those today who are deceived by supposed faith healers is that their miracles, which are not apparent and obvious, are no miracles at all.

We learn three other things about Peter and John: they were courageous, unschooled, and ordinary. Today, the power of the gospel rests on the shoulders of ordinary but courageous Christians.

Acts 4:15-17

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. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

These leaders of the Jews were puzzled as to what to do with Peter and John. Everybody living in Jerusalem knew about this outstanding miracle, leaving the leaders with the only recourse—a warning not to speak any longer in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:18-22

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

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.

When the leaders gave their command not to speak in the name of Jesus, Peter and John gave a reply that should be the reply of all Christians who are so challenged. They said, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” This example is in vivid contrast to how some of the leaders of these same Jews responded to Jesus. The issue of confessing Jesus was drawn during his personal ministry when he taught in Matt 10:32-33: “32 Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But

whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." During that time some of the leaders believed him but would not confess. John 12:42-43 teaches:

42 Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

The people were so taken with the healing of the man over 40 years old, the leaders dared not go against them and released the apostles, threatening them, but not punishing them.

The Apostles and Saints Offer a Prayer of Thanksgiving

Acts 4:23-24

23 *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.*

As one might expect, after their release by the chief priests and elders, the apostles returned to their own people, the church, and prayed. When Jesus instructed his disciples to pray, he included a proper address to the Lord, God, of heaven in Matt 6:9-13. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," he taught them. When Jesus prayed in John 17:1, he addressed God. "Father," he said. Here in Act 4:24, the church addressed God as "Sovereign Lord," and recognized that He created all things.

Acts 4:25-26

25 *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

"Why do the nations rage

and the peoples plot in vain?

26 *The kings of the earth take their stand*

and the rulers gather together

against the Lord

and against his Anointed One.'

In verse 25, it is important to note the apostles and early church, once again, recognized how scriptures come into being. God is the source of truth, and by his spirit, he speaks through the mouths of the inspired writers—in this case David. The statement of David is from Psalms 2:1-2. In their language, the apostles here are in harmony with Paul's description of how we get the word of God through the apostles and prophets in 1 Cor 2:11b-13:

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. . . . no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Acts 4:27-30

27 *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants*

to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

The church recognizes that their situation is an exact fulfillment of God's prophecy by the mouth of David. The Gentiles and peoples [the verb form in the Greek text is plural like form in David's prophecy] of Israel who killed Jesus were now threatening the church. The prayer is an appeal for boldness in speaking the truth on the part of the church, and an appeal to God for miraculous signs and wonders to confirm their words.

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

God's response to this prayer was immediate and powerful: God shook the place where they were meeting, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God boldly. All of this becomes preparation of the church for the events that follow. They certainly knew that whatever was to come, they would not have to go it alone—God, who created all things, would be with them no matter what.