

Acts 4

- Let's jump back into the events at the Temple as Peter heals a lame man and preaches to the Jewish crowd gathered around
 - Looking at the very end of chapter 3, we remember Peter's call to the Jewish crowd

[Acts 3:25](#) "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.'

[Acts 3:26](#) "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."

- As we ended last week we noted that Peter's sermon is decidedly eschatological in its focus
 - He is calling the Jewish people to repent and receive their Messiah
 - But his call emphasizes the opportunity for the Jewish nation to enter a time refreshing and enjoy the presence of the Lord
 - Peter assumes that if he could compel the entire nation to receive this call, then the Messiah's return would have taken place
- Remember the OT prophets never anticipated or understood an institution like the Church...it was a mystery
 - A mystery in the Bible is a component of God's plan that was previously unknown but has now been revealed
 - Paul himself declared that the Apostles were the ones given the mission to reveal the mystery of the Church

[Eph. 3:1](#) ¶ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles —

[Eph. 3:2](#) if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;

[Eph. 3:3](#) that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

[Eph. 3:4](#) And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

[Eph. 3:5](#) which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

[Eph. 3:6](#) to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, [Eph. 3:7](#) of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

- But at this early point, Peter hasn't yet appreciated this mystery himself, much less begun to teach it to others
 - Despite Peter's best efforts, this generation of Israel was not to receive the Lord's return
 - They were under judgment for rejecting the Messiah
 - And this generation was not to receive a second opportunity
 - Though an individual Jew could still receive the Messiah
 - And he could enjoy the promises in a future day in the Kingdom
- We're going to watch Peter grow as the gospel itself expands
 - First it grows among Jews, but soon thereafter it moves on to Samaritans and later Gentiles
 - And Peter will grow throughout this time, learning to accept that the Messiah came for other people beside the Jewish nation
- Finally, notice that Peter's sermon this time doesn't declare that baptism was required for this salvation
 - Only their belief in Jesus was required for the nation to receive their Messiah
- After preaching this sermon to the people, Peter naturally caught the attention of the leaders within the temple
 - And many of these leaders were exactly the same men who persecuted and conspired against Jesus
 - So when they see the commotion in the temple grounds and notice Jesus disciples at the center of the crowd, they became concerned
 - And they quickly reacted to what they saw

[Acts 4:1](#) ¶ As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them,

[Acts 4:2](#) being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

[Acts 4:3](#) And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

[Acts 4:4](#) But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

- Peter (and John) were still in mid-sentence when they're interrupted by the temple officials
 - Three groups of priests are mentioned, but in reality they were all probably from the same group of temple leaders
 - In the Temple you would find priests performing different jobs
 - Some priests acted as guards or temple police and one priest was the captain of that guard
 - He was second only to the High Priest
 - And the Sadducees were the ruling council of 24 chief priests who controlled the Temple ground
 - So altogether these men represented the authority responsible for the temple
 - The Greek phrase in v.1 should read confronted them
 - It indicates they were hostile from the start
 - And they were immediately bothered when they determined that they were teaching the people in the compound
 - In Israel, teaching on spiritual matters was not permitted unless the person had been carefully trained and approved by the Jewish leaders
 - And teaching in the Temple was the highest honor for teachers
 - Remember in the days before He was crucified, Jesus encountered still opposition when He taught in the Temple
 - The leaders challenged Jesus repeated to substantiate where He received His authority to teach in the Temple

- Secondly, the Sadducees were bothered to hear Peter and John teaching that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead
 - You may remember that the Sadducees had determined for themselves that resurrections was a myth and not true
 - So to hear someone teaching resurrection especially angered them
 - It was even worse that Peter declared that Jesus had resurrected
- Consider the dangerous trap that existed in Peter's day
 - On the one hand, teaching on spiritual matters was only allowed by teachers who had been approved by existing leaders and teachers
 - Secondly, those new teachers could only teach what was approved by men, even if that teaching was in conflict with the Scriptures
 - This is why Jesus condemned the leaders in His day when He said:

[Matt. 15:7](#) "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,

[Matt. 15:8](#) `THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS,
BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

[Matt. 15:9](#) `BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME,
TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'"

- They were teaching precepts of men as if they were doctrines, that is as if they were God's truth
 - And since they also controlled who could teach, they ensure that the truth was suppressed
- Do I even need to make the parallel to our day?
 - Men today are often required to complete certain sanctioning or ordination requirements before they may teach God's word
 - And those sanctioning bodies insist that their graduates adhere to certain prescribed views on doctrine
 - This pattern explains why we have denominations and church bodies separated by a common religion

- We act like Sadducees seeking people who will teach what we already believe
 - And if they teach differently, it's proof they are unqualified to teach
 - Obviously, some people are unqualified to teach, but the standard for whether someone should or shouldn't teach are provided in Scripture
 - And those qualifications don't include seminary, ordination or other man-made certifications
 - They do include tests of character and maturity
 - And ultimately a person's teaching is to be evaluated against the light of Scripture, not against denominational creeds
- Moving back to the text, these temple guards take Peter and John into custody
 - The text says they were "kept," probably in a room in the Temple
 - And since it was illegal under Jewish law to hold a trial at night, they held them overnight and planned to conduct an inquiry in the morning
 - Luke ends v.4 with a stunning contrast
 - Even as Peter and John are arrested, five thousand men who hear Peter's sermon come to believe in Jesus
 - It's hard to imagine how Peter could have stood and spoken in an open courtyard and expected to speak loudly enough to allow 5,000 people to hear
 - Much less that so many would agree with the message
 - Clearly a remarkable work of the Spirit to draw men to hear and believe
 - Luke's coupling of persecution with growth is a well-known relationship in church history
 - Those times when the church has endured it's greatest persecution is also the time when the church has grown the fastest

- And growth under persecution is particularly good growth, as it filters false confessors
- It produces a particularly strong and mature believer
- Whenever the enemy decides to strike out at the church through persecution, the Spirit inevitably uses that occasion to bring growth through pruning
 - The early church saw this pattern under Jewish persecution, Roman persecution, Roman Catholic persecution during the Reformation
 - Today it continues in many oppressed nations

[Acts 4:5](#) ¶ On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;

[Acts 4:6](#) and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

[Acts 4:7](#) When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

- A remarkable group of authorities were assembled to interrogate these two men
 - We have the entire Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Israel
 - Sadducees, Pharisees and the High Priest and the family of the High Priest
 - Remember there were two high priests at this time since the Romans had removed the true high priest and placed his son in law in the position
 - Both are present here
 - This is an unusually powerful gathering for two insignificant men
 - They focus their inquiry on their central concern - the healing
 - They weren't as much interested in the fact that these men were teaching or proclaiming Jesus as Messiah
 - Those claims by themselves posed no threat
 - They were disturbed by the powerful miracle that accompanied the teaching

- And by this fact we can understand why the Lord chose to award these powers to the Apostles
- The ability to perform these miracles was a key component to gaining the attention of both the crowds and the leaders of Israel
 - It's relatively easy to dismiss the unsubstantiated claims of "crazy" men
 - It's another thing altogether to dismiss a healing that cannot be denied
- Notice the question they ask the apostles
 - They want to know where their power came from to perform the healing
 - This is so similar to the questions asked of the blind man in John 9 after Jesus healed him
 - They ask the blind man the origin of Jesus' power
 - And the blind sarcastically mocks the leaders because the answer was obvious to him and everyone else
 - Yet the leaders acted as if the answer was a mystery because they couldn't bring themselves to admit that Jesus came from God
 - Their personal and political interests forced them to pretend they were ignorant and to deny the obvious
 - Here as well, the men ask about the name or power behind their healing, though the answer would have been obvious
 - Rather than mocking them as the blind man did, Peter gives them a straightforward answer

[Acts 4:8](#) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, " Rulers and elders of the people,
[Acts 4:9](#) if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,
[Acts 4:10](#) let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

[Acts 4:11](#) " He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone.

[Acts 4:12](#) "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

- This is Peter's third sermon in as many chapters
 - It's clear at this point that Peter has become God's instrument during the early days of the church to speak on behalf of the Lord to Israel
 - And like prior sermons, Peter speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit
 - I assume that Luke makes the point that Peter's speech is under control of the Holy Spirit to remind Theophilus of something Luke wrote in the Gospel

[Luke 12:11](#) "And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say;

[Luke 12:12](#) for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

- And to the leaders of Israel, Peter speaking under the Spirit's control declares that Jesus is the One doing this work of healing
 - And Peter not-so-diplomatically reminds the leaders that they were the ones who crucified this Lord
 - This is remarkable boldness, brought on by the Spirit
 - Peter had good reason to fear for his life, but the Spirit didn't allow Peter to focus on his own safety
 - This is exactly how all Christians are called to live, without regard for personal needs - we serve a Master
 - And in a comment that must have particularly angered the Sadducees, Peter repeats his claim of Jesus' resurrection from the dead
- It was the name of Jesus who healed the man standing before you lame, Peter says
 - Obviously, they had taken the lame man into custody too, probably because they wondered if the whole thing had been a hoax

- Imagine the poor lame man, finally able to walk but not locked up and unable to go anywhere
- Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22 that Jesus would be the most important stone in the building God is building in Israel
 - We see this verse today as a reference to the stone that starts a building, meaning the Church
 - But it's full meaning in the context of the Psalm is of a stone that serves as foundation for an obedient, glorified Israel
 - In fact, the verses in Psalm 118 that follow v.22 speak of the regeneration of Israel in the coming Kingdom
 - So Peter is again declaring that the Name of Jesus is the One rejected by Israel's "builders"
 - The builders were the leaders of Israel, the very men Peter is addressing
 - They rejected and stumbled over the stone that must form the foundation for the future Israel these leaders say they wanted
- Finally, Peter ends his short answer with succinct presentation of the Gospel...the need to believe in this Name
 - In response to Peter's defense, the council makes it's own observations

[Acts 4:13](#) ¶ Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

[Acts 4:14](#) And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

[Acts 4:15](#) But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another,

[Acts 4:16](#) saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

[Acts 4:17](#) "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

- First, the council made observations of Peter and John themselves
 - They were untrained, uneducated men

- Blue collar working class and no threat
- And they recognized them to have been Jesus' disciples, which wasn't a compliment
- In their attempts to explain the unexplainable, the leadership first considered that these men might have a power of their own
 - They had spoken eloquently and with authority and knowledge of Scripture
 - And yet they were uneducated and untrained by men
 - They were the acquaintances of a convicted criminal
 - And yet they were trained by the Holy Spirit, and so they displayed power and knowledge out of keeping with their station in life
- This is precisely the way Christ wants us to be seen among the world

[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, [1Cor. 1:28](#) and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, [1Cor. 1:29](#) that no man should boast before God.

- Secondly, the council inspected the man who claimed the healing
 - If they couldn't explain the healing by finding power in Peter and John, perhaps they could discredit the healing itself
 - But they had nothing they could say
 - The text says he was "standing" before them
 - The fact that a lame man was standing was proof all by itself
 - He was clearly walking
 - And since he was present at the Temple everyday for many years, there was no denying he had previously been lame
 - Now we see God's purpose in leaving this man in a handicapped state for so many years

- It becomes further proof and validation of the Lord's miracle through Peter
- Had the man only appeared a short time earlier in the Temple, the leadership could have claimed he was faking his inability to walk
- But after forty years, there was no way to deny the miracle
 - God may choose to leave us in a debilitated state for His own glory, which is his right as God
- After dismissing Peter and John, the men confer and discuss what to tell the people
 - The people of Israel took their spiritual direction from these men, and whatever these men told the people was accepted largely without debate
 - Notice they aren't looking for the truth
 - They are looking for a way to explain away the truth
 - In v.16 they say "we cannot deny it"
 - They want to deny it because it's existence is a threat to their power
 - So they resort to simply intimidating Peter and John and forbidding them from speaking to anyone else about what happened
 - Specifically, they didn't want Peter and John to speak "in this name"
 - Not only do they not speak Jesus' name themselves
 - They don't want anyone else to speak about Him
 - Here's an insight to the way the enemy tries to stop the message of the Gospel from spreading
 - Though he tries to distort and incriminate the message and the messengers, those tactics ultimately fail
 - The message is the word of God
 - And the messengers go out with the power of God

- Occasionally, the enemy will succeed in distorting the Gospel and produce false versions
- And occasionally he will discredit messengers who fall to temptation
- But usually the enemy is reduced to persecuting and intimidating the Church hoping to halt the spread of the message

[Acts 4:18](#) And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

[Acts 4:19](#) But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

[Acts 4:20](#) for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

- The leaders communicated their decision to Peter and John
 - But the apostles respond with a rhetorical question
 - Is it right to obey God or men?
 - Peter knew these leaders would understand the answer to that question was always to obey God
 - So Peter boldly tells the leaders he wouldn't obey their command
 - He reason is that they couldn't stop speaking about what they've seen and heard
 - Why couldn't they stop?
 - Because Peter couldn't control himself? No.
 - Because believers are called to be witnesses of the Gospel

[Luke 24:45](#) Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

[Luke 24:46](#) and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

[Luke 24:47](#) and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

[Luke 24:48](#) "You are witnesses of these things.

- Remember, the definition of "witness" is not someone who observed something

- The recent controversy over LeBron James' departure from Cleveland reveals that misunderstanding
 - In Cleveland, they used to declare they were all witnesses to LeBron's rise to stardom
 - They used the term to mean they were all observers
- But that's not the proper use of the term
- A witness is someone who testifies about something
 - It's a role of speaking after having observed
- Peter, John say they cannot stop speaking because they were made witnesses, speakers of things they saw
 - And all of us are commanded by Jesus to be witnesses too
 - Which means we are commanded to be vocal and to share what we know and understand about Jesus
 - And if we obey men who call us to be silent, we are disobeying the God Who has instructed us to be witnesses