

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 4.27.2025

PART 12 - BOLDNESS IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION

I. INTRODUCTION

- How would you handle opposition to your faith in Jesus Christ?
- For the entirety of the history of the Church, faithful preaching of the gospel has often drawn fierce opposition and persecution of Christ's followers.
- In our passage today, we see the first opposition to the preaching of the gospel.
- We have a portrait of boldness in the face of opposition.
- From this moment forward, the pattern will be set, the gospel will be opposed.
- From our passage we will draw key principles for when we face opposition as Christ followers.
- Main Point: All believers are called to be bold witnesses for Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, even in the face of opposition and hostility.

Acts 4:1-22

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one

another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 21 And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

II. THE WITNESSES OPPOSED

THE ARREST

- We are still in the story of the aftermath of the healing of the crippled man and Peter's bold proclamation of the gospel.
- Peter proclaimed Jesus as the servant of the Lord, the Messiah, God has glorified him, God has raised him up, and by faith in his name has the man been made whole.
- He called them the people to repent and turn to Christ so that their sins would be blotted out, that they would experience times of refreshing and have hope in the future restoration of all things through Jesus.
- Their preaching is interrupted. "As they were speaking to the people..."
- The priests and the captain of the temple and some of the religious rulers came upon them and arrested them.
- "They were greatly annoyed with the subject matter of what Peter and John were teaching and proclaiming.
- This is the first public opposition to the apostolic witness and what will be a recurring theme throughout the rest of the narrative in Acts.
- They held Peter and John until the next day because it was too late in the day to convene the council.

RAPID GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

- V4 is a remarkable notation that Luke makes. He reassures his readers that even though there is opposition to the preaching of the gospel, there is no force that can hinder the word of God and stop the advance of the gospel.
- V4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.
- The word had gone forth and people got saved. There is a dramatic and rapid expansion of the new community of faith.
- The gospel's advance is unstoppable!

THE SANHEDRIN

- Those arresting Peter and John were part of the legislative and judicial religious tribunal in Jerusalem.
- It was called the Sanhedrin.
- The Sanhedrin was like the Supreme Court of Jewish faith and life.
- It was composed largely of two groups, Pharisees and Sadducees.
- The captain of the temple was like the Chief of police, he was second in priestly rank only to the High Priest.
- Vv5-6 we see the cast of characters that assemble the next day.
- Rulers and elders and scribes; that is, the priests and the officials, the heads of the chief families of Israel, and the interpreters and teachers of the law.

- The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 members with 23 members forming a quorum to preside over legal matters and render judgment.
- The names mentioned:
- Annas, the high priest, was deposed by the Romans in 15AD, but he maintained his title along with his influence.
- Caiphas, was Annas' son-in-law, and the current high priest
- Both of these men figured prominently in Jesus's trial.
- John and Alexander, likely prominent figures among the Sanhedrin.
- Other members of the high-priestly family.
- Would Peter and John suffer the same fate as their Master?
- Would they also be handed over to the Romans and crucified?
- I imagine those thoughts crossing their minds.

THE SADDUCEES

- The Sadducees were the ruling class of wealthy aristocrats.
 - They were the Jewish elite who politically ingratiated themselves with the Romans and collaborated with them.
 - The Sadducees differed in theology and doctrine from the Pharisees on some very important points.
 - They held in contempt the oral traditions of the Pharisees.
 - They were not looking for a Messiah as they largely held that the Messianic age had begun during the Maccabean period.
 - They were theologically more liberal.
 - They denied every account in Scripture of the miraculous and supernatural.
 - They did not believe in angels.
 - And most importantly, they denied anything concerning a resurrection from the dead.
- Luke declares that what annoyed them was that Peter and John were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.
 - It was inevitable that conflict would arise between the Sadducees and the apostles.
 - They hated what the apostles were proclaiming, they hated Jesus, they hated his message, and they hated his messengers.
 - They saw the apostles as agitators. They wanted to hold on to their power structure and they feared the teaching of the apostles was subversive, risking further Roman interference in their land.
- Faithful proclamation of the gospel will result in people hating both the message and the messenger.
 - Most are okay with you following Jesus in your own private life, as long as you don't talk about him and keep it to yourself.
 - Talking about the exclusivity of Christ will get you into trouble.
 - But this should come as no surprise to us!
 - John 15:18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.
 - We will face the same hostility that Christ himself encountered.
 - Faithfulness to Jesus will often result in suffering for Jesus.
 - 2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

III. THE WITNESSES EMBOLDENED

A REVEALING QUESTION

- The next day Peter and John are brought into the meeting chamber of the Sanhedrin and placed in their midst.

- There was also a third man present—the crippled man who was healed.
 - The inquiry begins and the first question is, “*By what power or by what name did you do this?*”
 - It’s an interesting and revealing question.
 - They were passively admitting that there was undeniable evidence that something miraculous had happened for which they could not account.
 - A man everyone knew to be crippled from birth, more than 40 years old, whom they had seen every day begging for alms at the gate, was now standing before them, healed and made whole.
 - The evidence was indisputable.
 - The question was meant as a diversion tactic.
 - The question was also a refusal to entertain, even for a moment, what Peter had so clearly proclaimed in Solomon’s porch—the man was healed in the name of Jesus.
 - The question revealed the ignorance of the body of people that were the experts in the law of God yet failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, as Peter had proclaimed in his message.
 - The question exposed their fear of the apostles’ teaching because it undermined and threatened their authority.
- Deuteronomy 13 gives careful instruction to the rulers of God’s people about how to handle a situation in which a prophet arises in their midst and gives a sign and wonder.
 - Here are two men standing before them, an indisputable sign has taken place, and they are attempting to apply these ancient instructions but they have already revealed themselves to be blind guides of God’s people.

A FRESH FILLING

- The question was an open door for the apostles to proclaim the gospel.
- In that moment, Peter and John received a fresh filling of the Spirit.
- In their moment of need, as they stood before this court that sought to condemn them like they had done to their Lord, they received what Jesus promised them.
- Luke 12:11-12 And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”
- Luke 21:12-15 But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. 13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness. 14 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.
- They speak with great courage and conviction as they are enabled by the Holy Spirit.

A BOLD PROCLAMATION

- Peter does not bypass an opportunity to preach and address these religious rulers who are attempting to prosecute them.
- Peter is not preoccupied with mounting a personal defense. He points them to Jesus.
- He answers their question.
- *“It is by his name—Jesus—and by his resurrection power alone, that this man is healed.”*
- Notice how Peter concludes his sermon.

- He is not a prophet who performed a powerful sign and is attempting to lead people away from Yahweh.
- Peter invokes Psalm 118, quoting the Messianic prophecy about the rejection of the Messiah, and says to them that Jesus is the stone that was rejected by them, the builders, which has now become the cornerstone.
- Even Christ's crucifixion and rejection was foretold by God.
- If they believed God's Word, they would become followers of Jesus.
- He is not leading people away from Yahweh, he was acting in harmony with Scripture that all pointed to Jesus as Messiah.
- Peter is not ashamed to proclaim the exclusivity of Christ.
- Peter unashamedly told the truth—Jesus is the only way.
- There is no salvation outside of Jesus.
- We are tempted to water down the gospel message because of fear of man, fear of reprisal, or fear of being thought of a certain way.
- Ultimately it comes down to what you believe about Jesus and how one can be saved.
- When you talk about the exclusivity of the gospel message, you will be thought of by some as being narrow-minded and even hateful, intolerant and bigoted.
- But we need to speak the truth in love.
- We must rely on the Spirit's empowerment to embolden us to declare the truth.
- If we sincerely desire for those around us to know Jesus Christ and find life in him, we need to risk the relationship, risk our reputation, and risk being rejected.
- A faithful proclamation of the gospel will offend.
- Make sure it is the gospel message that offends—not that they find you offensive.
- Notice how the apostles were bold yet still respectful. We are representing Christ. Remember his example before his opponents.

IV. THE WITNESSES' OBEDIENCE

A STRONG IMPRESSION

- After the examination which probably consisted of more questions than the one that Luke records, the council members had formed strong opinions of the apostles.
- They "saw the boldness of Peter and John."
- Holy Spirit boldness is undeniable. There is a courage that can only come from the Spirit.
- "They perceived that they were uneducated, common men."
- These were not men trained under the law or trained in the interpretation of the Scriptures like they were. These were common folk.
- They were like their Master Jesus, who also lacked a formal theological education yet he possessed such wisdom and knowledge of the Scripture.
- Peter and John displayed great boldness of speech, clarity, and conviction that astonished the council.
- "They recognized they had been with Jesus."
- These were Jesus's disciples. They had been in close proximity to Jesus.
- But here is what they didn't get and failed to recognize.
- Jesus is with these men and speaking through these men right in that very moment through the indwelling and empowering of the Holy Spirit.

THE DELIBERATION

- Peter and John are cleared from the chamber for the deliberations.
- “*What are we going to do with these men?*”
- The miracle is undeniable, it is publicly known, but the message and the messengers must be silenced.
- The leaders of Jerusalem who were supposed to welcome their Messiah, want to stifle any preaching in his name. They are opposing the very one they had been anticipating.
- Notice they don’t attempt to discredit the apostolic witness to the resurrection even though that’s the centerpiece of Peter’s message.
- They charge Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

THE DETERMINATION

- Peter and John respond, “*You judge whether your charge is right in the sight of God that we listen to you rather than to God.*”
- Peter and John defy the council. They are not going to abandon their responsibilities as Christ’s witnesses.
- After further threatening, Peter and John are released.
- The leaders are beholden to the people’s opinions but the apostles submit themselves to God’s authority.
- Luke makes note that he was more than forty years old. He was crippled from birth and everyone seemed to know him. The Sanhedrin was silenced, its leaders unable to oppose the rapidly-increasing community of Christ followers who proclaim his name and resurrection.
- Now, Scripture commands us to obey rulers and authorities. (Romans 13:1-17)
- But we are not to obey commands from rulers and human authorities that contradict God’s Word.
- Obeying the Lord is always the right path.
- We must obey God first—no matter the cost.

CONCLUSION

- We need Holy Spirit boldness to fearlessly and courageously proclaim the gospel and then to stand firm in it when challenged and opposed.
- We need the same conviction and courage of the apostles to fear God and not man.
- Don’t be ashamed of the gospel—it’s the power of God to save!
- Students—don’t be afraid to talk about Jesus at school and with your friends, even if it feels weird and awkward.
- Stand firm in your workplace, shine your light so that it can be seen.
- Share the gospel with family members even if it means visits can be weird and confrontative.
- The boldness we see in Peter and John was not the result of natural courage, it was the fruit of having been with Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit.
- That same Spirit indwells and empowers us today.
- We are all called to be bold witnesses for Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, even in the face of increasing opposition and hostility in the world today.
- Proclaim the name of Jesus with unshakeable confidence in his exclusive saving power.
- And when we face opposition, remember we are never alone. Christ stands with us.
- We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard—Jesus is Lord—He is risen—and salvation can only be found in him alone!

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?