

The Book of Acts

Lesson 7: Before the Council: No Other Name -- Acts 4:1-31

The healed beggar is still leaping. The crowd is still gathered. Peter is still preaching Jesus and the resurrection, when suddenly the temple guard arrives with the priests and the Sadducees, and the mood turns cold. These religious leaders are furious. It is bad enough that these untrained Galileans are teaching the people, but they are teaching the one thing the Sadducees deny most of all: that in Jesus the dead are raised. So they arrest Peter and John and throw them in jail for the night.

But the word has already done its work. Luke notes, almost in passing, that many who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. You can chain the messengers, but you cannot chain the message. By morning a formidable court has assembled: rulers, elders, scribes, the high priest's family, the very men who had condemned Jesus to death a few weeks before. They set the two fishermen in their midst and demand, by what power or by what name did you do this?

It is a terrifying question in a terrifying room, and Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, does not flinch. By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, he says, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, this man stands before you well. And then he lifts the moment to its highest point: this Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

The council is stunned. They can see the boldness of these uneducated men, and they recognize something deeper: these men had been with Jesus. They cannot deny the miracle standing in front of them, so they fall back on threats and order the apostles to stop speaking in this name. Peter's answer rings down through history: we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. Then the church gathers, not to plan an escape, but to pray for more boldness, and the place is shaken.

Group Discussion: Ordered by the most powerful court in the land to stop speaking about Jesus, Peter and John answered that they could not stop telling what they had seen and heard (vv. 19-20). When have you faced pressure to keep quiet about your faith, and what helps a believer find the courage to speak?

Personal Reflection: The council took note that these ordinary men had been with Jesus (v. 13). If people watched your life this week, would they sense that you have been spending time with Jesus? What in your life points to Him, and what does not?

Read Acts 4:1-31

Study Questions

1. The priests and Sadducees were greatly annoyed because the apostles were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (vv. 1-2). Why was the message of the resurrection so offensive to these leaders, and why is the resurrection still central and confrontational today?
2. Peter and John were arrested and jailed simply for preaching Jesus (vv. 3-7). When standing for Christ costs you something, ridicule, exclusion, a strained relationship, an opportunity lost, how do you tend to respond? What would faithful courage look like for you?
3. When commanded by the highest religious court to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused, saying they must obey God rather than men (vv. 18-20). What principle does this establish about the limits of human authority, and how should believers apply it carefully and rightly?
4. The apostles could not keep silent about what they had seen and heard (v. 20). Where in your life do you find yourself staying quiet about Christ out of fear or convenience? What is one relationship in which God may be calling you to speak more openly?
5. Peter declared that Jesus is the stone that you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone (v. 11). What does this image from Psalm 118 teach us about Jesus, and what does it mean that the rejected one became the foundation of everything?
6. The builders examined Jesus and cast Him aside, yet He was the cornerstone all along (v. 11). Are there areas of your life where you have quietly set Christ aside, treating Him as less than the foundation? What would it look like to rebuild on Him?
7. The council was astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, perceiving that they were uneducated, common men, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus (v. 13). What does this teach us about how God uses ordinary people, and about the effect of time spent with Jesus?
8. People could tell that Peter and John had been with Jesus simply by watching them (v. 13). If your coworkers, neighbors, and family observed you closely this week, what would they conclude about who you spend time with? Where do you most need to be reshaped by time with Christ?
9. Peter declared, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (v. 12). What does this verse teach about the exclusivity of salvation in Christ, and how do we hold this truth with both conviction and love in a world that prizes tolerance?
10. After being threatened and released, the church gathered not to plan escape but to pray for boldness, and the place was shaken (vv. 23-31). Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to greater courage or faithfulness, and what is one step you will take this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 118:22, the rejected stone become the cornerstone, fulfilled in Christ; John 14:6, Jesus as the only way to the Father; 1 Timothy 2:5, the one mediator between God and men; Acts 5:29, the resolve to obey God rather than men; Matthew 10:26-33, courage to confess Christ before others without fear