

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts4_Response of Religious Leadership & The Bonding Effect Upon Believers)

Introduction

In chapter 3, we have the account of Peter and John healing a man who was lame from birth and who daily begged for donations at one of the gates of the Temple. (We discover in 4:22 that the man was over forty years old). This man was so well-known that the Jews who were at the Temple were absolutely amazed. The healing of this man must have caused them to reflect upon the fact that the last time that they observed such miracles was when Jesus walked among them. Peter used the occasion to proclaim Jesus as the Promised Messiah in Whose power the miracle was performed. Peter's message is very eschatological and Messianic.

Peter's message and the tremendous response that it elicited among the people (about 5,000 men eventually believed – 4:4) created a great deal of concern on the part of the Jewish religious leaders. The subject of chapter 4 is the response of the religious leaders to this event as well as the subsequent bonding effect between believers that resulted.

The Apostles Testify Before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22)

The religious leadership of Israel centered in Jerusalem was extremely disturbed by the preaching of Peter and John. They had the Apostles arrested and jailed overnight until the next day when they could examine them thoroughly. In verses 1 and 5, Luke mentions several groups and individuals.

- The "priests" (v. 1) – these are the men of the tribe of Levi who were descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother.
- The "captain of the Temple" (v. 1) – this was a priest who had command of the Levitical Temple police and he was responsible for maintaining order within the Temple grounds.
- The "Sadducees" (v. 1) - arose from the ranks of the priests of Israel after the return from captivity and were viewed as more aristocratic in nature than the Pharisees.¹ The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection and did not believe in angels or spirits. They tended to be more loyal to the Roman government, thus they had a desire to maintain the status quo. They acknowledged only the written law (the Pentateuch) as binding and rejected the oral tradition developed over the centuries. As a result, on many occasions, the Sadducees took a stricter interpretation of the Law than did the Pharisees. The Sadducees put great stress upon human freedom and minimized God's sovereignty in relation to man's free will
- The "rulers" and "elders" (v. 5) – these two terms are probably both references to members of the Sanhedrin council. The Sanhedrin council was a Jewish council that arose during the Hellenizing period of Jewish history and was translated into a form of puppet rule under Rome. The Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6) and elders. The elders were mostly lay nobility and primarily Pharisees.

¹ The "Pharisees" were a non-priestly group of uncertain origin, generally learned, committed to the oral traditions, and concerned with developing *Halakah* (rules of conduct based on deductions from the law). The Pharisees in the Sanhedrin were laymen in the sense that they were not priests; however, many of them were scribes (i.e. teachers of the law) and thus different from the elders. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees arose from the ranks of the scribes and priests of Israel after the Babylonian captivity (i.e. after the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in 516 BC). The Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul through a resurrection. They also believed in the existence of angels and the providential sovereignty of God.

- The “scribes” (v. 5) – a description of some of the Pharisee members of the Sanhedrin who focused upon being teachers of the law.
- “Annas the high priest” and “Caiaphas” (v. 5) – Annas was Caiaphas’ father-in-law and Annas had been high priest from A.D. 6 to 15 and was deposed. His son-in-law, Caiaphas was high priest from A.D. 18 to 36; however, Annas continued to have significant influence. At this time in Jewish history, the high priests were appointed by Roman governors.
- “John and Alexander” (v. 5) – it is not known who these men were; however, it is possible that “John” was the son of Annas who succeeded Caiaphas in A.D. 37.

So, imagine the setting. Most of this same assembly had tried Jesus and now they were facing two of Jesus’ prominent followers at whose hands, God had performed an incredible miracle that was undeniable. Peter’s teaching about the resurrection challenged the beliefs and teaching of these religious leaders. The Sadducees were from aristocratic families who were courting the favor of Rome to maintain their position of influence and wealth. After all, they must have reasoned, God surely could use them more if they were in positions of power and influence – even if getting into such a position meant compromise. The last thing the Sadducees wanted was to have a couple of uneducated men to stir up the crowds and declare the resurrection of their king.

Principle: When persecution and adversity strikes you as a yielded believer, it is very likely God is positioning you to be used to glorify Him. [The result of the Sadducees taking two men (Peter and John) into custody was that eventually 5,000 men would believe (plus many of their wives and children)].

The religious leaders, who still refused to accept that Jesus had been resurrected and was the Messiah, asked the Apostles by what power and by what name they performed such a miracle (v. 7). In verse 8, Peter begins his reply while “filled with the Holy Spirit.” This filling of Peter is a type 1 filling which means that the content with which Peter was “filled” was the Holy Spirit.² This type of “filling” of the Holy Spirit is similar to the enduement with the Holy Spirit that select believers experienced in earlier days of the Age of Israel.

Peter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, spoke with a boldness that was in stark contrast to the spiritual weakness he had displayed the night of our Lord’s arrest and trial only about a month and a half earlier. This contrast emphasizes the fact that we are spiritually powerless when operating in the energy of human determination; however, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, then like Peter, we too can be bold in the exercise and display of faith in our lives. Even though Peter is speaking while influenced by a type 1 filling, the same effect or outward display of spiritual strength can characterize the believer today where the type 2 filling should be normative.

Principle: There is no spiritual power, strength and fortitude in the believer’s life until the believer has learned to yield to the Spirit of God to transform his/her heart into conformity with the character of Christ.

Principle: A knowledge of Operation KRY and the definition of yieldedness alone will NEVER bring about any spiritual transformation in the believer’s life.

² In another lesson within another series, I have detailed all of the passages that have a similar Greek construction pattern as Acts 4:8 and termed this type of “filling” of the Holy Spirit a type 1 filling. This is in contrast to the filling that is commanded for every believer by Paul in Ephesians 5:18. In this passage, the grammatical construction (syntax) indicates a different content of the “filling,” i.e. the character of God or Christ. I have termed this a type 2 filling. The type 1 filling was temporary and associated with the Age of Israel and the transition period between the Age of Israel and the Church Age. The type 2 filling is considered normative for the Church Age believer since the Apostle Paul commands it.

Principle: Only the believer who is aggressively seeking the very mind of Christ as described in Proverbs 2:1-4 will find Him – His power and strength (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The religious leaders were not seeking Truth – they were just posturing, posing and protecting their position in society. How transient? How worldly centered? How void of depth and eternal purpose and value? What a waste?

Peter identifies the One by Whose power the miracle had been performed by appealing to Psalm 118:22. Those who heard Peter's comparison of Jesus to the "chief cornerstone" understood completely what he meant. There were many references in the Scriptures where the Messiah, the One Who completed God's plan for humankind, was compared to a stone. For instance, consider the following:

- "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" – Isaiah 8:14
- "A foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious corner stone" – Isaiah 28:16
- A "stone cut out without hands, which smote the image" of Gentile world power and ground it to powder – Daniel 2:34

Other uses of the imagery of a stone or cornerstone depict the cornerstone as the chief stone or the stone at the corner of a foundation. In the first century A.D., the expression chief cornerstone was also used to refer to the stone placed on the summit of the Temple in Jerusalem. When stones were cut out of the quarry and found to have cracks or flaws they were cast aside and marked – "Rejected."³ Jesus uses all of this imagery in Matthew 21:42-44 where He quotes from Psalm 118:22-23 and applies it to Himself.

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?' Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." (Matt 21:42-44)

Christ was rejected by those who were supposed to be the builders of Israel. But now this Stone has been exalted at the right hand of God and is the cornerstone upon which the plan of God is centered as He builds His kingdom. Peter builds upon this further in verse 12 as the word "salvation" goes back to Psalm 118 where it is a prominent theme. Verses 22-29 in that psalm anticipate millennial deliverance. In Acts 4:12 Peter was referring to both individual and national deliverance.⁴

The religious group of "leaders" were astonished that these uneducated men spoke with such boldness and courage in the presence of such an austere audience in front of whom they should have been intimidated and cowering. As a matter of fact, boldness in the face of religious opposition is a prominent theme in the book of Acts (2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31). The Sanhedrin was silenced in awe and the Apostles were experiencing what Christ had promised (Matt 10:19-20; Lu 12:11-12; 21:12-15).

The leadership did not deny the reality of the miracle. They deliberately refused to mention the word "Jesus" choosing instead to use the phrase "this name." This is the first of four times that some of Jesus' followers were brought in front of the Sanhedrin. Other occasions include: 1) Peter and the apostles – 5:27; 2) Stephen – 6:12; 3) Paul – 22:30.

³ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 33.

⁴ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 363.

The religious leadership did not want to invoke a riot and bring further attention to the matter by punishing these men, so they opted for the route of intimidation. They tried to suppress the information flow.

The Bonding Effect of Persecution Upon Believers (4:23-37)

Instead of dispersing and becoming discouraged, these early believers were bound together by the persecution and adversity they faced. They had seen the hand of God at work and knew that He was fully capable of providing for them. They quote from Psalm 2:1-2 and make a connection between the events now unfolding before their eyes and the opposition to the Messiah that would precede and accompany His coming. Obviously, they anticipated the return of Jesus and the glories that would follow His death, i.e. the Messianic Kingdom. Peter's message (3:19ff) was still fresh on their minds. The result of their prayer for God's protection and intervention was a confirmation from God through a shaking of the room and a type 1 filling of the Holy Spirit.

The chapter closes with an account of the believers sharing all things in common and an introduction of Barnabas. The sharing here is not communism. It only worked one time in history per the Scriptural account – when all the believers were “filled” (type 1) with the Holy Spirit. (This arrangement breaks down in the next chapter where some were not filled with the Holy Spirit and became jealous of the character displayed by Barnabas). Furthermore, later in Acts (i.e. Acts 15:26), there was great need among believers and Paul takes up a collection from the Gentile churches to help the saints at Jerusalem.

Luke introduces Barnabas to the reader here. This is a common technique of Luke – he introduces a character in a minor role, then later, he brings him on stage in a major role.