

Confrontation

Acts 4: 1-22

Our passage of study today follows immediately upon the preceding events of chapter three wherein Peter healed the crippled man which launched him into a sermon calling the Jews to repentance for their rejection of the Messiah. These events took place in Solomon's Colonnade in the temple courts at the time of prayer. A large crowd had gathered to see and hear Peter after witnessing the miraculous healing of the crippled man outside the gate called Beautiful. Verse 1 of Chapter 4 tells us that the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees approached Peter and John while they were still speaking. The priests mentioned here are likely the priests on duty for the day performing their temple duties. While this identification does not rule out members of the Sanhedrin – also Levitical priests, the text here does not seem to recognize members of the Sanhedrin being present in great numbers.

The captain of the Temple Guard was the 2nd highest ranking of the priestly hierarchy, second only to the High Priest. He was chosen from the priestly aristocracy, and his appointment to this position was considered a stepping stone to the office of high priest. He has the responsibility of maintaining order in the temple grounds and possessed the authority to arrest those perceived as threatening that peace and order.

The Sadducees were the religious/political faction who held the majority in the Sanhedrin. (The other two factions were the Pharisees and the Essenes.) The Sadducees believed only the Pentateuch (the books of Moses) of the Torah as valid, rejecting the oral traditions of the Pharisees. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul or the resurrection. They also did not believe in demons or angels. Politically they came from the landed aristocracy, and they took an accommodationalist view of the Roman occupation. In other words, they preferred peace with the Romans in order to protect their economic holdings (wealth) and their political position (power) in the Sanhedrin sanctioned by local Roman government. Their major concern was the preservation of peace and order so as not to bring conflict with the Roman authorities, and thereby potential losing their positions of power and wealth.

The Sadducees were not so concerned about John and Peter proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, as much as they were concerned about the Apostles proclaiming a resurrection of the dead in the name of Jesus. It is a subtle difference. The idea of a general resurrection was an apocalyptic concept with messianic overtones. Messianic ideas among the Jews of that time, under Roman authority, led to revolt in order to restore the Davidic Kingdom. At least two other such uprisings had occurred as referenced in Acts 5:36-37. The Sadducees were concerned because Peter and John were gathering a large following, as did Jesus, that could (and did in AD 66) lead to a revolt bringing the Romans down upon them. The Sadducees wanted to stop the spread of what they perceived to be an insurrectionist movement. At this time the Jews were looking for a Messiah that would rid them of Rome, not a Messiah that would bring a Spiritual Kingdom. They were looking for a physical political kingdom rooted in the line and style of

David. Peter and John were arrested on suspicion of insurrection. They were brought before the Sanhedrin for a hearing and investigation into their actions.

In verse verses 5-7 we are told Peter and John are brought the next morning before the assembled Sanhedrin. Note who is present: Annas, Caiphas, John and Alexander who are all of the same family, and all of them either have been or will be High Priests, a position appointed not by the Jews, or the Sanhedrin, according to Torah, but by Roman authority. One way Rome exerted its influence and authority was to appoint local citizens to political positions believing the local population would be more willing to be governed by their own people. The position of High Priest became a political tool and was no longer the sacred position of mediating before man and God. When the council demands, *“By what power or name did you do this?”* (v.7) the council is not asking by whose power the healing has come to the lame man. They are demanding to know by whose authority they are speaking and inciting the crowds. Look down the v. 17, the Sanhedrin is concerned about this movement spreading, not the fact that people are being healed. They want to find the “ringleader” and the source of their teaching. They are more concerned about authority, proper accreditation, law and order, and fear of a messianic uprising.

Peter purposely takes the opportunity to answer the council by pointing out that the healing is by the name of Jesus launching him into a sermon to the Sanhedrin on the saving power of Jesus. The Apostles’ job is to spread the good news. They are taking advantage of the opportunity to share it with those who should have recognized the signs in the first place. Peter proclaims, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (V. 12). The Greek word *sozo* means both salvation in a physical healing, making the body whole, as well as the eternal salvation of the soul. Ironically the name Jesus feared by the Sanhedrin is the very name that means salvation. Peter also charges them with denying the messiah, God’s anointed servant and savior. He is boldly implying that the Sanhedrin must repent so they can be forgiven and find salvation. The lame man’s healing was a sign not only to the crowd outside the temple, but also directed at the Sanhedrin, who should have recognized this sign for what it was more so than any other group of people. They should have recognized and been moved by what was clearly evident: The Power of God was at work restoring the lame signaling that the Messiah had come. But instead of seeing what was plainly before them, they were blinded by their own power and authority, and the potential threat to it.

While the Sanhedrin recognized that the miracle occurred, it is more concerned about a potentially insurrectionist movement spreading. They cannot deny the miracle and they have nothing with which to charge the Apostles. They have done nothing against the law. The Sanhedrin does the only thing in their power. *“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”* (V 17). The significance of this warning is more than a threat to deter the Apostles from speaking about Jesus. It establishes a legal foot-hold for the Sanhedrin. If and when the Apostles speak about Jesus, they will be guilty of disobeying the court. The court will have legal grounds to prosecute the Apostles just as they prosecuted Jesus.