

Day 7 : Acts 4:13-22

Prayerfully read: Romans 13:1-8, John 15:16-27

Understanding

Notice that this was a very odd trial. Peter and John were never told what the charge against them was! A wonderful healing had happened – no crime!

Notice too the foolishness of the council's response. They knew that a great miracle had happened (v16). They knew too that Peter and John were speaking with an insight and boldness beyond their own human powers (v13). They knew, too, that they had been with Jesus – the Jesus who had performed similar miracles (v13). Yet even so, they just refused to repent. They had no grounds on which to oppose Peter and John – yet decided to insist upon it on their own authority anyway. Having no reason to punish them, they nevertheless threatened them instead (v21)

In our society today, forty is about the absolute career limit for a professional sportsman. Afterwards, physical condition only deteriorates. It seems to have been the same then too (verse 22). Yet this man was healed!

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Christians must be ready to be opposed for the sake of the gospel – even by authorities, and without any good reason. Yet we must not allow this to affect our determination to speak the truth – knowing that we are doing what we do “in the sight of God” (v19), who we must consider first of all, and who we must always honour and have in reverence.
- Peter and John's response shows us that whilst human authorities do have authority over us, yet that authority is not absolute. If they require something that God has forbidden (or vice-versa), then they can be ignored in good conscience.
- Sin and opposition to righteousness are both unreasonable and destructive – and often relentlessly so. We must not be surprised when we see people stubbornly carrying on in sin even though it ruins them.

Applying

- Are people able to tell that we have been in the presence of Jesus? Does his word and Spirit so influence us, that people notice the difference?
- Are we so blameless that even someone who really wants to find fault with us cannot manage to do so? This is the standard to aim for.
- Take heart – God will protect his own people; we ever live in his sight.

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 3 (Chapter 3-4:22)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

Day 1 : Acts 3:1-10 – The Lame Man Healed

Prayerfully read (above and): Isaiah 35:1-10, 42:1-9

Understanding

Acts 2:43 has just told us that many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. Luke then describes one of those. Acts 2:47 also told us that the church enjoyed the favour of all the people. Now Luke is going to show us how the first opposition began.

The “ninth hour” is 3 p.m. - the regular hour for afternoon temple prayer. The early Christians continued to worship in the temple, until the Jews expelled them. Jesus had prepared them for this, telling that the temple would be gone within a generation (Matthew 24:1-34).

The “Beautiful Gate” is thought to be the gate on the east by which a person entered from the Women's Court from the Gentiles' Court.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The purpose of the apostles' miracles was to draw attention to the great name of Jesus Christ, as the risen Lord (v6) who rules over all.
- When the apostles performed miracles, they were immediately totally effective (v7) – even in the hardest cases. They were not like modern “faith healers” who blame the person being healed for not having enough faith. In this case, the lame man was not even asking to be healed!
- God is sovereign. He is able to give a person a great blessing when they have no idea that it is coming. He is not limited by our feebleness or lack of understanding.
- All true blessings come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The right response to receiving a blessing from God is praise (v9).
- As before (2:12), people did not know what the miracle meant – they needed Peter to preach to them to explain it.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What blessings have you received from God? A main reason for a discouraged and difficult Christian walk is not being thankful. Think slowly about some of the blessings you have received from Jesus. One old write said, “What? Is it not enough for you to be happy that Jesus has purchased a heaven for you? Must you have two heavens, one then, and one now, before you can be happy?”

Day 6 : Acts 4:5-12 – No Other Name!

Prayerfully read: Psalm 118, John 14:5-11.

Understanding

Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law (John 18:13). It is thought that Annas was the nominal high priest, but was too elderly to perform all his duties, and so his son-in-law deputised for him; see Matthew 26:3, Luke 3:2.

Notice that the council did not deny that a great miracle had been performed. Nobody could! Their question, rather, was *how* it had been performed.

Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Here, as elsewhere in Acts, this primarily meant that he became equipped to give a bold and direct testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ – see Acts 2:4, 4:31, 9:17 & 20, 13:9-10.

Again, as in the earlier “sermons” in Acts, Peter calls attention to the facts concerning Jesus – his identity (the Christ of prophecy), life, death and resurrection – and concerning his hearers; their sin and guilt (particularly in Jesus' death).

Verse 11 is a reference to Psalm 118:22. Christ himself used this prophecy to speak of his rejection and ultimate triumph (see Matt. 21:42, Mark 12:10).

Nominally, Peter was on trial. However, God so opens his mouth, that when he spoke, it became clear that really the council was on trial – in the courtroom of God. Verse 12 is one of the many New Testament verses which states clearly that there is no other way of salvation except through Christ. Whatever other “names” there are, they are not endorsed by God.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- There is no possibility of salvation, except through the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only Saviour given by God to men; unless we believe in him, we must be damned. The world's religions do not save, because they have not been given by God. God raised Jesus from the dead to testify that he was the Saviour – he has never given any such testimony concerning another.

Applying

- Jesus Christ is the Saviour – but is he your Saviour? Have you experienced the power of his name to make you whole before God?
- Because there is no other Saviour, we must love our fellow men by supporting the work of evangelism – both at home and abroad. What evangelistic projects do you support and pray for? Pray for them today.

Day 5 : Acts 4:1-4 – Persecution Comes!

Prayerfully read: John 15

Understanding

The “Sadducees” were one of the movements within Judaism at the time of the New Testament. The Sadducees did not believe in the existence of the soul, life after death, or the resurrection. (See Mark 12:18-27, Acts 23:8). Most of the temple authorities were Sadducees. As verse 2 tells us, it was particularly the preaching of the resurrection of the dead that they took objection to. The other major movement we find in the Bible were the Pharisees – they believed in all these things.

In Acts 2:41, the church had grown to around 3,000; here, in verse 4, there are 5,000 men alone. They heard what Peter had preached, and believed it.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Persecution is inevitable for the Christian church. Its message cuts across many cherished beliefs of those who here it. Just as Jesus was hated, so his body on earth will be hated.
- Many people reject the gospel because it cuts across their personal pride and prejudices. The Sadducees did not consider the great evidence (in the healing of the man) that Jesus was risen, but rejected it because it contradicted their school of thought. Pride prevents us from receiving many blessings.
- The growth of the church is not stopped by persecution. In fact, it has often been the case in church history, as in Acts, that the church has grown fastest at times of persecution. The church's growth does not depend upon whether men oppose the gospel – it depends upon the risen Lord Jesus Christ, in his sovereignty, being pleased to bless it.
- Faith comes through hearing (Romans 10:13-15). The way that people come to faith in Jesus is through *hearing* about him (v4).

Applying

- Have you ever faced opposition because of your testimony and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ? If you have not, is it possible that it is because you have not been bold for him? If you find that this is so, then seek the Lord's mercy and ask for grace to not be afraid of others.
- How do you feel about the prospect of being opposed and disliked? Surely you do not like it! But meditate upon how the Lord grew the church at that time (v4). Pray for persecuted Christians in North Korea.

Day 2 : Acts 3:11-16 – Peter Begins Preaching

Prayerfully read: John 18

Understanding

The people were amazed by the miracle, but did not know what it meant. Powerful miracles do not convert anyone – they need the word to be preached. Peter, as an obedient witness to the Lord, seized the opportunity.

Peter was quick to make sure that he did not receive any glory for the miracle (v12). Rather, he drew attention to the Lord Jesus Christ (v13-). Peter preached Christ as God's “Servant”, the “Holy One and the Just”, the “Prince of life”. He spoke of his undeserved death, and his resurrection (v15). He spoke of the great value of faith in Christ (v16). He preached that Christ was able to give perfect “soundness” (“wholeness”) (v16). He insisted that he was speaking about something he had personally experienced of (v15).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The purpose of Christian witness is to draw attention to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to lift him up as the Lord and as the Saviour. If we do not do this, we are not witnessing.
- Christian preaching must concentrate on the historical facts about the Lord Jesus Christ, and insist upon them. The Christian faith is not something that can be separated from history – to do that destroys it. Either Jesus lived in perfect holiness, died for our sins, and rose to rule – or he didn't! That he did is an essential part of Christian proclamation.
- The nature of sin is that it chooses death instead of life. It is perverse, even though it causes great harm to the person committing it. The Jews' chose the murderer (Barabbas) instead of the “Prince of Life” (v15), even though Pilate tried to persuade them to let Jesus go! You can probably think of many sins which obviously cause great harm to the person committing them – yet they do it anyway!

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- The Lord has commanded us to bear witness to him (Matthew 28:18-20). Are you doing this? How does today's passage show us how to do this? Think of people near to you who have not heard about Jesus, and begin praying for them regularly that you may be able to bear witness to him.
- Think about one of your own “problem” sins. Meditate on what its results are. Ask the Lord to show you how foolish and destructive it is. Then, when you are tempted to that sin, try to bring this to mind again.

Day 3 : Acts 3:17-21 – Repentance Preached

Prayerfully read: Acts 17:16-34

Understanding

Peter says that the Jews crucified Christ out of ignorance. This does not mean that they could not understand that what they were doing was wrong. Rather, it is that they did not understand that he really was the Messiah – even though there was so much proof of it.

Peter preached that it was God's purpose that the Messiah would suffer (v18). To the Jews, it was a great stumbling block to them to be told that their Messiah was crucified as a criminal – rather than a great military leader. They needed to be shown that this was what God has planned.

The “times of restoration of all things” (v21) must mean the end of the world and the final judgment, and the making of the new heavens and the new earth. Christ shall remain in heaven until that time. The “sending” of Christ in verse 20, then, must be by His Spirit to the church.

Sins of ignorance are still sins – and so Peter insisted that they be repented of.

In God's great mercy, even the most enormous sins – such as the murder of God's Son – can be forgiven.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The Old Testament prophets prophesied a crucified Christ. This was not a new teaching which God had not revealed before.
- Christian witness is not complete when the great facts about Jesus have been explained. There must also be an insistence that the hearer repents. To repent is to make a decisive turn from sin to the Lord. It is essential for salvation.

Applying

- Have you repented? Have you seen the awfulness and enormity of your sin in the sight of a Holy God? Have you realised that there is mercy for those who trust in Jesus Christ? Have you received God's promise?
- Think of some sins that you are now aware of that before you were “ignorant” of (v17). And use them to thank God for his great mercy.
- Next time you read the Old Testament prophets, look for prophecies about Christ. Are there things too great for any mere man to fulfil? Are there promises of pardon of sin, and blessing from God?

Day 4 : Acts 3:22-26 – Peter concludes

Prayerfully read: Deuteronomy 18, Genesis 22:15-18

Understanding

Moses, the prophet, led God's people out of their captivity. He had presided over their redemption from Egypt at the time of the first Passover. He had performed great miracles. He had been their mediator between them and God. He had had God's mind revealed to him word by word. And he prophesied that there would be another such prophet like him in the future. To fail to hear this future prophet would mean death. That prophet was the Messiah. You can see how the people understood this in John 1:21, 25, 45, 6:14.

Concerning Samuel (v24), one commentator says “Samuel was the prophet who anointed David as king and spoke of the establishment of his kingdom (1 Samuel 13:14, 15:28, 16:13, 28:17), and the promises made to David found their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus.”

God had a deliberate plan in the preaching of the gospel. First, it should be preached to the Jews – the descendants of Abraham and inheritors of the promises made to him. Afterwards, it should then be preached to the whole world. See Romans 1:16.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- A preacher ought to use all the arguments he can to persuade his hearers. We must not think we have done our job when we have just delivered the facts! We must seek every way possible to impress upon people their urgent need to trust in Jesus Christ.
- The coming, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was in fulfilment of the promises which God had given 2000 years earlier to Abraham. Yet there was no automatic privilege for Abraham's descendants or for anyone else – each person must individually repent.

Applying

- Have you realised that the Bible is all one book? It has a single plot from start to finish; whether you are in the days of Moses, or Abraham, or Samuel, or anyone else – it is leading to Christ. When you read the Bible in this way, it becomes like a whole new book!
- Have I been “turned away from my iniquities” (v26)? That is why Jesus Christ came! Have you heard and obeyed His voice (v23)? To not do so is death! Think of and pray for 5 unconverted people you know.