

The Acts of the Apostles

Lesson: 5

Topic: Peter and John are Arrested and Persecuted for Preaching the Gospel

Reading: Acts 4:1-31

Review

- Going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, Peter and John heal a man who was lame from birth.
- They don't do this through their own power, but through the name of Jesus.
- Amazement and wonder filled the people there.
- As this was at the temple and the people there were Jews, Peter preaches a sermon calling all to repentance and faith that is based on the OT.
- He revealed to them how Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT promises of God.

Scripture Analysis

Verses 1-4

- “And as they were speaking to the people...”
 - Indicates this is a continuation of Acts 3.
 - Peter is in the process of speaking or had just finished speaking.
- “...the priests, and captain of the temple and the Sadducees..”
 - Priests – Levites who worked in the temple offering sacrifices.
 - Captain of the Temple – Chief of the temple police, a Levite second only to the high priest in the temple hierarchy.
 - Sadducees – Jews who held to the Law of Moses and the Oral Law but didn't accept the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees. They didn't believe in the resurrection, in angels, or in spirits. They also didn't long for a Messiah the way other Jewish groups did.
- QUESTION: What did these people do to Peter and John and why?
 - Arrested them and put them in prison.
 - Because Peter and John were teaching the very doctrine they were opposing.
 - They were proclaiming that Jesus was risen from the dead, which was evident in the healing of the lame man.
- QUESTION: Yet, in the face of this persecution, how many came to faith? What does this tell us about how faith is created?
 - Over 5,000 men came to faith.
 - Faith comes by hearing the Word of the Lord (Rom. 10:17).
 - The temple authorities couldn't destroy the Spirit's work.

Verses 5-7

- “On the next day...”
 - The day following the healing and Peter's preaching and arrest.
- “...their rulers and elders and scribes...”
 - To put it another way, the Sanhedrin.
 - This is the same council of Jews that delivered Jesus to Pontius Pilate to be crucified.
- QUESTION: What did the Sanhedrin ask Peter and John?

- “By what power or by what name did you do this?”
- As a judicial investigation, the apostles were asked to make a statement regarding themselves.
- Whatever they say can bring upon them serious charges.

Verses 8-12

- QUESTION: What was Peter’s answer?
 - “By the authority of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”
 - The Man who stood before them and was handed over to Pontius Pilate to be crucified.
 - Peter’s wonderful defense isn’t credited to his powers or great courage, but the Holy Spirit, He who came upon the Apostles at Pentecost.
 - The Holy Spirit puts this confession into Peter’s mouth.
- “Jesus is the stone that was rejected...”
 - Another OT reference.
 - Jesus is the ‘Stone’ mentioned in Psalm 118:22, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”
 - For those who reject Him, Jesus is a rock of offense and a stumble block.
 - But for those believe, He’s sure and solid footing.
 - Entire Foundation (1 Cor. 3:11)
 - Or in this case, the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:4), which the foundation is set upon.
- QUESTION: What does Peter say about Jesus and salvation?
 - There is salvation in no one else but Jesus, “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
- “...no other name...”
 - Notice again the reference to the “name” of Jesus.
 - Jesus is the saving content of the Gospel’s message.
 - In Jesus, there’s forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.
 - It’s the name that’s put upon you at your Baptism and every Sunday.
 - And only Jesus saves.

Verse 13-18

- QUESTION: What two things made the Sanhedrin marvel?
 - Peter and John spoke with, “...all boldness...”
 - Peter and John weren’t concerned for their life.
 - They were concerned with faithful confessing Christ to sinners.
 - Speaking words of Law and Gospel.
 - And Peter and John were, “...uneducated...”
 - Unschooled fisherman.
 - They never had any formal education, that is they never attended a rabbinical school as those in the Sanhedrin would have.
- QUESTION: What could the council not deny?
 - That a miracle had been performed and everyone knew of it.
 - The Sanhedrin couldn’t deny the hard evidence.

- Yet, even with hard evidence, these men refuse God’s gracious appeal, with dire consequences in time (Jerusalem destroyed in 70 AD) and in eternity (John 3:18).
- “...let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.”
 - Since they couldn’t deny what Peter and John had done and couldn’t keep them locked in prison...
 - They threaten them and order them to not speak in Jesus’ name.
 - So basically, “stop doing this...”
 - In a way, you can say they got off with a warning with the further threat of punishment if it continues.

Verses 19-20

- QUESTION: How do Peter and John respond to this threat?
 - “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”
 - Peter and John refuse to be silenced even by the threat of the Jewish supreme court.
 - There is a higher authority, one who rules over all.
 - Peter and John refuse to be silenced, not only because they have to answer to God, but they were eye witnesses to Christ’s resurrection.
 - Jesus had won salvation through His crucifixion, death and resurrection, according to the Scriptures.
 - They clung in faith to these promises and were willing to suffer further persecution.

Verse 21-31

- QUESTION: What did Peter and John do after they were released?
 - They went and reported to their friends what had happened (v.23).
- QUESTION: What did the apostles do when they heard the report?
 - We see them lifting up their voices together in prayer.
 - In their prayer they include Psalm 2 (v. 26):
 - This speaks of persecution by the kingdoms of the world, and
 - Gives the promise of the Lord’s deliverance.
 - They prayed for that they would be bold and faithful in preaching the Gospel in the midst of persecution (v. 29).
 - And prayed that they would have strength to perform the signs as He had commanded (v. 30).
- “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken...”
 - The answer to their petition was immediate and miraculous.
 - The Holy Spirit shows His presence by a sign similar to, but distinct from what occurred at Pentecost.
 - A new measure of the Holy Spirit was bestowed on them.
 - By the Holy Spirit, they continued their public preaching openly and freely as though the Sanhedrin had never made a threat.
 - They obeyed God rather than men.

Terms

Catechesis Summary

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