

**5/10/15**

**Acts 4:1-12**

## **The Joy of Persecution**

*And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, **2** greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. **3** And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. **4** But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. **5** On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, **6** with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. **7** And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" **8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, **9** if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, **10** let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. **11** This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Gospel clarity is a really rare thing, mostly because it can be very upsetting even when it's presented in the most winsome way. There's something exposing and confrontational about the claims of Jesus and his followers. There is something unsettling about the claims that we as Christ followers make. There's something unsettling about the things we claim about Jesus. We are saying: if you give your life to Christ, and believe that God sent him to die on the cross in the place of sinners and that God raised him from the dead, then you experience change in this life and eternal life in a place we call Heaven. And we are saying that if you reject that, you will go to Hell and be tormented eternally.

That is a strange truth in such a modern world. This passage has one of the most famous and unsettling verses in the entire Bible. It's down there in v. 12 when Peter says "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Here is the positive uniqueness of the name of Jesus. It presents a problem for us because we serve an exclusive Christ in an inclusive age. But we can never forget the ringing clarity of Jesus saying: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6); Or Paul saying (1 Timothy 2:5), "*There is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.*" That is the truth that drives us toward Gospel clarity and you should know,

**Gospel Clarity Always Brings Trouble**

Let's get right to the truth and get our points from the story in Acts 4:

### **Gospel Clarity Upsets the *Status Quo***

It's always been that way from the beginning. Christ crucified and raised from the dead has set people's teeth on edge. It's what's happening in this story.

In Chapter 4, Peter and John have just healed a man and God used that miracle to draw a crowd and Peter preached a Gospel message. Verse 4 says that many that heard the Word and believed. But it upset the *status quo*.

Notice v. 1-2 *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.* The priest and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them That word - "*Ephistemi*". This is the idea of coming upon them suddenly with hostile intent. The *status quo* hated what they were teaching. In fact in v. 21 Luke tells us they were greatly annoyed. This group included the Sadducees which were a ruling class of wealthy aristocrats that had politically ingratiated themselves to the Romans. They were technically Jews but were theologically liberal. They denied the resurrection and they were not looking for a Messiah. They saw the apostles as agitators and fanatics. And what the apostles were preaching upset the *status quo*.

It's what the Gospel has always done, stood over against a decaying culture and said: "Don't go that way! There is death over there. You can only find life and hope and joy in Christ." It has always been that way. If you live with Gospel Clarity, it will change:

1. The nature of your relationships
2. How you spend your money
3. What you do with your free time
4. How you will raise your kids
5. And it will always be at odds with the world.

So why are we trying so hard to be like a culture that is rotting and corrupt at the core? Why do we value transient things when this world is passing? Why do we pursue the American Dream when America has rejected the Gospel?

Brothers and sisters, let us shake off the chains of sexualized materialism and live our lives for Christ! Let us go outside the camp where Christ is and bear the shame He endured. Let us live with Gospel clarity, embracing the trouble we know it always brings.

Gospel clarity always brings trouble because it upsets the *status quo*.

Another reason it brings trouble is:

### **Gospel Clarity Costs You Personally**

Most People agree that Chapter 4 describes the first steps toward persecution of believers. Verse 3 tells us they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day. In other words, they spent the night in jail.

Now think about it, here's their crime: Peter and John went to the temple to pray, encountered a man lame from birth, healed him and preached the hope of Christ...and were put in jail.

Look, the strange times we live in are nothing new. As Americans, we've just forgotten. It's been about 350 years since it cost us personally to believe that salvation comes by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But we are headed into days of personal cost.

If you really believe what this book says, then your job, social standing and community reputation will be in danger. But that's not all bad. We're going to find out who really believes the Gospel. Persecution has a way of separating the wheat and the tares.

Another thing is that a culture that hates Jesus gives us a chance to display God's Glory. What I mean is, in Chapter 5 the Apostles are arrested again for the same sort of thing. This time they were beaten and threatened and Acts 5:41 says, *"They left the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."* Brothers and sisters, if living the Gospel is not costing us personally in the God-forsaken culture, then we are not living right. We must learn to find joy in the honor of being poorly treated for Christ's sake.

Gospel clarity: 1. Will always bring trouble 2. Always cost personally...

## **Gospel Clarity Identifies Us With Jesus**

Let me show you what I mean.

Notice who is coming after Peter and John in v. 1 & v. 6 *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, - with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.* Now listen to those who arrested Jesus: in John 18:17, *"So the head of the soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they lead him to Ananias for he was the father in law of Caiaphas - who was high priest that year."* Peter and John are being persecuted by the same exact people who had persecuted and crucified Jesus a few weeks before.

Remember what Jesus said in John 15:18-19: *"If this world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of this world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of this world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* Jesus will go on to say in Matt 5:11-12, *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets before you!"*

Look we need to come out of the timidity. You need to come out of your compromise and pseudo-half-Christianity and embrace the great joy and honor of being identified with Christ. Let us abandon this "pretend Christianity" that thrives on entertainment and self-empowerment because that Christianity wilts in the face of cancer and tragedy and persecution and pain.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, "*And let us run the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*"

That's what you were made in the image of God for: to give glory to God. Step away from the addiction; step away from the sensuality; step away from the hatred or racism or indifference. Step away and come to the cross of Christ. Turn from your sin – turn to Christ. Gospel clarity always brings trouble but it is worth the trouble.

The Christian life is the life lived in the shadow of the cross.

*(Pastor shares the Gospel and prays)*