

5/24/15

Acts 4:13-22

A Hated Christianity

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. **14** But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. **15** But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, **16** saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. **17** But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." **18** So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." **21** And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. **22** For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.*

Since 1620, when the Pilgrim Fathers signed the Mayflower Compact "to establish a colony to the Glory of God and the advancement of Christian Faith," the continental United States has always been a place that promotes and protects religious freedom. Freedom and specifically religious freedom is at the core of what it has meant for more than 200 years to be American.

The First Amendment has guaranteed the free exercise of religious freedom so that you and I can worship freely as our conscience dictates. Brave men and women died for that freedom so that the First Amendment can serve as a blanket of protection, which means, I can freely exercise the dictates of Biblical Christianity without fear of harassment, detriment or persecution.

But Memorial Day 2015 has found the First Amendment strangely under the growing *zeitgeist* (spirit) of the day. The very air we breathe is choking out religious freedom, the ability for you and me to put our hands on the Book and say, "I believe, without equivocation, what this Book says."

That freedom is losing ground even as our heroic dead lay sleeping in their graves, and we are going to need to figure out how to live as Christian Americans which means something totally different today than it did 35 years ago.

The Moral Majority and Religious Right are no more. They were two crutches that kept us from standing on our own two feet. We have to learn how to live in a post-Christian America, and I believe that the best way to do that is to look at pre-Christian Jerusalem, Where Peter and John were detained for healing a man in the name of Christ and then declaring salvation in Christ alone.

In the first verses of Chapter 4, Peter has given a direct and clear witness of Christ and now the council stands in amazement. We are going to find out:

A Real Christianity is a hated Christianity

Lives are not changed without opposition, and Gospel living is the mandate we have been given. So there are several things we must be filled with. Last week we talked about being filled with the Holy Spirit, because v. 8 of Chapter 4 tells us that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. What else do we need to be filled with? What do we live with or what are we marked by?

We Must Live With Boldness

It's right there in v. 13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished." The first word to consider in verse 13 is the word "boldness." Boldness is a slippery thing because it's different from rudeness on one side or bravery on the other.

Think of it like this: boldness is the openness of unembarrassed speech. If you have children – 2 or 3 years old – you have experienced unembarrassed speech at the most inopportune time. They say things you wish they didn't say but she isn't embarrassed. It's the Christianity that's in you declared to the people around you. We all understand that love must find relief in expression. You love someone, you express it some kind of way.

For Christians, one way our love for Christ and His word is expressed is in the boldness of our lives and words. Words relieve a full heart. Do you remember what the prophet Jeremiah said about giving a testimony? In Jeremiah 20:9 we read, "*If I say I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name, there is in my ear, as it were, a burning fire shut up in my bones and I am weary of holding it in and I cannot.*" Whoever has a real personal experience of Christ's saving power and has heard and seen him will be irresistibly compelled to impart what he has received. And if there is no praise o your lips, If there is no thanksgiving in your heart, if there is no testimony in your life of God's grace, if there is no story you can tell about your conversion, if there is no faith that is swelling up and demands to be spoken, then there cannot be any Christ in you.

So I would invite you in the middle of this sermon, to think on your general disposition in life. What is in you will come out. It's not my sermons that make this church or our

programs or people. It's Christ in you, the hope of Glory. In this new post-Christian America, we must learn to live in boldness.

We Must Get Conversant with the Bible

Let me show you what I mean. It's in v. 13. Read it again and look how Peter and John are described, as uneducated and common men. It's not very flattering but when you look closer, it actually wasn't an insult. Uneducated - the Greek ἀ γράμματος – means they had not received formal training in rabbinic theology. They hadn't been to seminary; they were common men, not professionals and the Council was astonished because they were conversant with scripture.

Think about who this is, Peter and John – writers of the New Testament – these were not illiterate men – they were laymen who knew the Bible and were conversant with it. "Uneducated men" did not mean they were dumb, it meant they weren't professionals, but they knew the Bible.

They didn't have Flexible Benefits and fashionable behavior. They understood that the sea of cultural relativity stops at the shore of Biblical fidelity and the greatest most unanswerable proof of Christianity is a bold Christian, conversant with her Bible.

We are a *reading* people, not just words on a page but food for our soul and strength for our battle. And if God will use you for His glory in the ever-darkening world, you must learn to live with a boldness that marks you as a Christian and you must get conversant with what the Bible says thematically, holistically, and specifically.

And driving all this is my third point:

We Must Bear the Marks of Christ

Shouldn't that be the overwhelming flavor of our personality and the dominating quality of who we are? Shouldn't we be able to say with Paul in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

Peter and John were able to say that. Look what Luke tells us in v. 13. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* They recognized that they had been with Jesus. When the Council saw how Peter and John stood, the Council recognized that they had the same demeanor Jesus had had several weeks prior. They had been with Jesus and that explains it all.

Listen: Being with Jesus is your prerogative, and where your treasure is, your heart is also. When you stay close to Christ, the aroma of His grace will be all over you. That old adage is true: *who* you spend time with is *what* you become and the surest way to be what God has designed you to be is to direct your life at being with *Christ*.

I believe in knowing what you believe and why, in acquiring knowledge. But acquiring knowledge is no use without a heart that is on fire. And being with Christ ignites. Your love for Jesus will make itself known. I have outlined all of this on Memorial Day when we celebrate the price of American freedom, because freedom for the American Christians (who hold true to "the faith once and for all delivered to the Saints") will soon be no more. And a person of Christian principle will be put in situations such as Peter and John are in. They were offered freedom and the price of conscience.

Let us join them in saying in v. 19 "whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Like Martin Luther when he was asked to recant, let us say "I cannot and I will not recant anything, to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand. I can do no other, so help me God."

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- Live with Boldness
- Converse with the Bible
- Bear Marks of Jesus – Those are the marks of Crucifixion

(Pastor shares the Gospel and prays)