

The Effect of God's Power

Acts 4:13-22

As we have studied first few chapters in the book of Acts, I have tried to keep a focus upon the big picture of the day of Pentecost. It was the day when the Holy Spirit of God was poured out upon the church, the day in which the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached and the power of the gospel made evident by supernatural miracles. So we have looked not only at that miracle of tongues in chapter 2, which is the speaking in foreign languages so that all the nations could hear the gospel, but we have also looked at this distinctive miracle of healing of the lame man in chapter 3.

Acts 3:6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God."

In that context of miraculous power, the gospel was proclaimed, the gospel of salvation. And last time, two weeks ago, we focused upon the promise of that salvation which is found in name of Jesus Christ alone.

Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Today we see the same thing that the Jewish leaders say in two of the apostles, Peter and John. Only the Jewish leaders saw it with unbelief, and therefore rebellion, as we will see shortly. What they saw was boldness.

v.13 "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John,

and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

I want to begin this morning with an acknowledgement of that boldness, that confidence, noting that,

I. JESUS' POWER IS DISPLAYED IN THE APOSTLES.

So I am not here to praise Peter and John. I am not here to emphasize how strong and powerful they were as apostles, but rather to emphasize that what we see in them is nothing less than Jesus' own power. And perhaps the most praiseworthy thing I will say about Peter and John is what was observed about them, in verse 13, "And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

"They realized" refers back to,

v.5 "And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, 6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

So it is the Jewish leaders who are observing these common men, now apostles, Peter and John. And it is the prominent and powerful Jewish leaders who are compelled to acknowledge with regard to Peter and John that "they had been with Jesus." And what did they see? What was it about Peter and John that so represented the influence of Jesus upon their lives?

v.13 "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

They saw,

A. Boldness and wisdom.

I'll start with boldness. "They saw the boldness of Peter and John." Boldness there means confidence, outspoken confidence. They spoke freely, plainly, bluntly, without reservation, without any ambiguity or uncertainty. They knew what they were talking about, and they didn't hesitate to make it known.

That's a work of God. That's a display of Jesus' power. The apostle Paul would later pray for such boldness himself.

Eph. 6:19 "[Pray] that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

In a very small but similar way, I know what this means personally. By personality, by natural demeanor, I am not bold in speech. I am not powerful in the use of persuasive words, nor do I naturally speak with any expression of power or authority. Except when I preach, by the power of God at work in me. So I'm not here to share with you some of my thoughts and ideas. I am here, in this pulpit, to speak boldly and confidently about what God has revealed in his word. And I do it with confidence, a confidence that is in no way founded in me or in my own personality. Rather it is a confidence borne of the assurance of God's power at work through the means he has ordained. In this case and in this place, that means me. In Acts 4, that meant Peter and John. The Jewish leaders saw their boldness. Not their arrogance or human superiority, but the confidence with which they said the things they did, because "they had been with Jesus."

The Jewish leaders also saw their wisdom. We read in verse 13 something of the condescending way in which Peter and John were viewed, which if you understand what is actually recorded for us in these words, demonstrates what true wisdom is all

about. Notice what they say about Peter and John.

v.13 "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men..."

They were undedicated and untrained men! Common men. Ordinary men. Ignorant. Unlearned. Even illiterate! They were stupid men! That's what the Jewish leaders were saying. I want you to have a real sense of the insulting nature of those words, but then see how they are recorded for us to identify the wisdom of Peter and John. They marveled, we read in verse 13, they were astonished, because these stupid, illiterate men were actually saying something quite profound. And that is why my emphasis is upon wisdom. They didn't look at Peter and John and marvel at how smart they were, or how educated they were, or how eloquent they were. They marveled because they had none of those external credentials but still were speaking with such undeniable wisdom.

I would propose that is the best thing that could have been said about them! Because it emphasizes that the power of God is upon them. And with all appropriate humility and self-awareness, I would strive for that same impression for myself, even as the Apostle Paul expressed with regard to himself,

1 Cor. 2:1 "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

So Jesus' power is displayed in the apostles, the power of boldness and wisdom. And my own ministry will be effective only

to the degree that that same power is displayed in me, and in my own personal weakness. Again, Paul, “my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

The apostles displayed a second way in which Jesus’ power is displayed, and this is limited and restricted to them, as apostles, laying the foundation of the church. And that is, the display of,

B. Supernatural, miraculous power.

Supernatural...above and beyond nature, above the natural power by which things ordinarily come to pass. And I mean those words as synonyms..supernatural and miraculous.

That is what this whole passage is about.

v.14 “And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.”

They didn’t like that, and they rebelled against it, as we will see in just a minute. But for now, the obvious. They saw “the man who had been healed standing with them.” They saw him. They couldn’t deny his existence. And we read further,

v.16 “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.”

At least they are honest! “We cannot deny it.” “A notable miracle...is evident to all.” Remember what we read in,

Acts 3:8 “So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God. 10 Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at

what had happened to him.”

We will see this again in the book of Acts, again and again, the supernatural, miraculous power of God at work in the life of his church. Those miraculous works accomplished by the apostles are all part of the foundation upon which the church is established, for those miraculous works all testify of the power and presence of Jesus. So we read of the gospel of salvation,

Heb. 2:4 “God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.”

However, the response to the display of Jesus’ power wasn’t simply faith and repentance! Sadly, because of sin, the response to this display of power was not saving faith to trust in Jesus for salvation, as it should have been! We something very different here, a different response.

II. A RESPONSE TO THE DISPLAY OF JESUS’ POWER.

We read in verse 13, “they marveled.” Or, in the ESV, “they were astonished.” Whatever English word you use to translate it, the idea is that they didn’t believe! They marveled because what they were not prepared to believe in Jesus’ power despite what they saw in the miracle. They were astonished because the evidence before them contradicted the unbelief of their hearts. They didn’t believe in the supernatural power of God evidenced in the presence of Jesus his son. They didn’t believe in God’s power to raise Jesus from the dead or to heal this man who had been lame all his life. They didn’t believe in such power from the true and living God. But there it was, this lame man standing before them whole! But even then, they wouldn’t believe! Their response is one of,

A. Unbelieving astonishment.

They marveled, verse 13. To a certain extent, they were silenced. They knew they couldn't deny what they saw. And so we read,

v.14 "And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it."

And again,

v.16 "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it."

You see the effect of sin, don't you! They saw the power of God with their own eyes, and yet they remained in their unbelief. That is why the resurrection of Jesus assumes such a central place in the proclamation of the gospel, because that is demonstration of supernatural power above all others! And there is historical evidence for it! And yet people still will not believe, will they? Such is the stubborn power of reigning sin in the heart and mind of fallen men. Unbelieving astonishment! And such dreadful rebellion against God brings forth,

B. Willful and selfish antagonism.

Just look at what we see here.

v.15 "But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

"They conferred among themselves." I hate words like that, I hate situations like that. They gathered together to conspire against Jesus and his apostles. "What shall we do to these

men?" How can we silence them? How can we punish them? How can we destroy them! This is all so entirely willful and deliberate. Everybody saw the miracle so we cannot deny that it happened! But they are threatened by Peter and John. They are intimidated by them. They are opposed to them, with severe antagonism. And what they seek is obvious, the words tell us in verse 17, they don't want this gospel message to spread among the people and gain popularity.

v.17 "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

We've seen the miracle, we've seen the display of God's power, we can't deny it, and everyone else has seen it to. So what can we do? Let's threaten Peter and John! Severely threaten them, not just warn them, but threaten them, to shut them up and keep them quiet. Thus my words to describe that, "willful and selfish antagonism."

That is what the unbelieving world does in response to the display and demonstration of the power of the gospel. Willful and selfish antagonism. It has always been that way. Go back to,

Ps. 2:1 "Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us."

We hear a response from God himself.

Ps. 2:4 "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."

That king is, of course, Jesus. And Jesus speaks next in that great Psalm.

Ps. 2:7 “I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ ”

Then comes the warning, the warning of the gospel!

Ps. 2:10 “Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

That is, of course, the invitation of the gospel. “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

That is not what the Jewish leaders did. Instead we read of their attempt to impose an,

C. Authoritative prohibition.

v.18 “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

You will quickly realize that the apostles would never submit to such an prohibition, nor should we ever do so as well. Instead what we find in our text is,

III. A FAITHFUL WITNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

v.19 “But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to

God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

That is a rather polite way of saying, “We will not submit to such an order.” Peter and John frame the question exactly as it ought to be framed, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.” That’s what they were requiring of Peter and John. The Jewish leaders said, “listen to us not to God!” And the apostles would have none of it.

v.20 “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

There again is there boldness! Their confidence. We have seen the power of God, and we will speak of it! We see this same declaration in,

Acts 5:27 “And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Thus Peter continued, obeying God rather than men.

Acts 5:30 “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

This isn’t an invitation to chaos or anarchy. This isn’t an excuse to disobey carelessly or indiscriminately, but it is a call to a faithful witness of the gospel. “We ought to obey God rather

than men.” And if men require of us to be quiet about the power of Jesus in the gospel, we must disobey. Out of necessity!

v.20 “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Thus we see,

A. The priority of our obedience.

Our faithfulness. Our boldness!

v.20 “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

We will not listen to men more than to God, to answer the question of verse 19. We will obey, despite whatever opposition we might encounter. I should emphasize here one of the vows I took upon my ordination and installation as a minister of the gospel. The words are explicit, “Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?”

So it is, that when it comes to the witness of the gospel, we must obey God rather than men! We must. “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” That is just as true today as it was for Peter and John.

One final point as we study this narrative, the conclusion of this particular encounter,

v.21 “So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.”

The conclusion is simply this, that God protected Peter and John at this point. The Jewish leaders found “no way of punishing them,” verse 21, “because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.” You see, the people recognized God’s power. With this miraculous healing, with the people, there was,

B. The recognition of God’s display of his own power.

They saw God’s power, and they honored him, they glorified him “for what he had done.” They were all praising God for what had happened. And that is how the church was established. That is how the church is built. Not by our efforts nor by our strategies or vision, but by the saving work of God in our midst. The church of our Lord Jesus grows when God is at work in such a way that others see it and praise him for it.

So pray to that end! Pray for God’s hand to be at work among us, for God’s hand to continue to be at work among us. That work today is the work of changing lives, the work of transforming the lives of his people, that would no longer live in their sin and rebellion against God. That work of God today is the work of the Holy Spirit working in us the fruit of the spirit, kindness, goodness, and patience. That work of God today is the work by which rebellious unbelievers come to confess and believe in the Lord Jesus, and whose life of faithfulness demonstrates the power by which sin is put to death more and more.

So I will preach to you the gospel. I will be “zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel ...whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account.” And I will pray that God’s power would be evident in us, and in his church, until the end of the age.