

## Gospel Triumph: Commitment Through Conflict – Acts 4:1-22

I've been listening to an audiobook about the beginning of the Civil War. It covers the time from the presidential election of 1860, when Abraham Lincoln was elected, till the South attacked Fort Sumpter in Charleston South Carolina in April of 1861.

I've been amazed so far how Lincoln has handled the growing tension and conflict leading up to the war as he prepared to take office. The president before him, James Buchanan, has cowardly avoided a strong stand and tried to avoid conflict so his term could end without war. Lincoln didn't intentionally provoke animosity, but he boldly and confidently did what needed to be done. His courage was not arrogant brashness. It came from his understanding of the core principles of the American Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He believed those principles and sought to apply them as the new leader of the country. This belief gave him the resolve he would need to handle the presidency and lead through a time of great conflict.

So far in the book of Acts the Apostles haven't experienced any opposition. They have preached and done miracles and people have come to Christ. But that is about to change in chapter 4. This chapter tells us about the first major conflict the Apostles experienced in Jerusalem, and it will only get more intense from here. Anywhere the Gospel goes in Acts, opposition and strife will follow. But the Apostles are fully equipped to respond correctly to opposition because of their core beliefs. So, here's what we will see in Acts 4:1-22. **3 Characteristics of God's Renewed People in the Face of Conflict.**

### **1. Conflict because of Christ (vv. 1-4)**

Chapter 4 clearly continues the story that began in chapter 3 with the healing of the lame man at the temple. We walked through this last week. After healing the man, a crowd gathers around Peter and John and Peter takes the opportunity to explain the significance of the healing to them. Look at 3:11-12. His explanation continues through the end of chapter 3. Look at verses 24-26.

Now as we begin chapter 4 notice that the Apostles are still speaking about Jesus to the people as they are approached. Look at verse 1. The Sadducees were a powerful group within the priesthood and the captain of the temple was the one

ultimately responsible for what happened on the temple grounds. This group of religious leaders isn't all that pleased when they approach the Apostles. Look at verse 2.

Verse 2 gives us two reasons that they were annoyed. The simple fact that the apostles are teaching in the temple precinct drives them nuts. They certainly weren't licensed to do this or have a position to enable them to publicly teach. But beyond the simple fact of their teaching, notice the topic. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The Sadducees denied a bodily resurrection of anyone so this would have made them particularly mad. But these are the people who had been involved in putting Jesus to death and had no doubt heard of His resurrection and had tried to cover it up. If Jesus really rose from the dead, it validated everything He had said and done, and it meant that these priests and Sadducees were clearly on the wrong side of God's work. They couldn't have this. So, look at verse 3.

Verse 3 is one response to the preaching of the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 4 is the other response. This indicates that the number 3,000 that we saw in chapter 2 has now risen to 5,000. This probably doesn't include women and children and so the number of converts may have been north of 10k people. A massive number for this time.

Verses 1-4 give us the setting of the conversation that happens on the following day, but I want to draw your attention once again to the reason for this conflict, Jesus. They were clearly explaining the significance of the resurrection and this caused tension and annoyance. Listen, we have a clear message that is offensive to sinful sensibilities, we do not need to be offensive in the way we handle ourselves. Conflict with the culture for the Christian should be because of Christ, not because of us. Let's move to our second characteristic.

## **2. Commitment to the Only Cornerstone (vv. 5-12)**

After spending a night in jail all the big wigs show up. Look at verses 5-6. These are the very people involved in the "trial" and crucifixion of Jesus. They are all the most important Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. This is the Sanhedrin. They ask a very intentional question in verse 7.

They clearly know what had taken place the day before. They probably know that Peter announced the healing in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. But they are trying to draw this out publicly as a way of charging the Apostles with blasphemy.

They also aren't particularly concerned with truth and whether or not this man had been healed through the power of the resurrected Christ. They are trying to condemn the Apostles because they present a challenge to the status, power, and wealth of the Sanhedrin. One of my favorite movie scenes of all time is in the film *A Few Good Men* where Tom Cruise's character, a lawyer, gets Jack Nicholson's character to admit to a crime on the witness stand by pressing him and knowing exactly what to say in the moment. I'm always amazed when people seem to have the perfect answer to a public question, and they phrase it in exactly the right way. That's how I feel about Peter's response here and there's a reason for his. Look at verses 8-12.

Jesus promised that help like this would come to the Apostles. Listen to Luke 12:11-12. Peter boldly points out that yes, this man was healed by the name of Jesus. He also goes after the Sanhedrin as responsible for Jesus's death and makes it clear that their rejection of Jesus puts them in the unenviable position as rejecting God's cornerstone. Look closely again at verse 11.

This is a quote from Psalm 118 and Jesus used this same passage to condemn the religious leaders, but what is Jesus the cornerstone of? Listen to 1 Peter 2:4-10. He is the cornerstone of the new temple God is building, the church. This is an astounding point to make after being arrested in the temple by the leaders of the temple. God is building a new building, the church, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and the old Temple is fading away in significance. God's presence no longer dwells in the old temple, it now dwells in the new temple through the arrival of His Holy Spirit. And how do you become a part of this new temple? Well, by being connected to the cornerstone. Look at verse 12.

It's through the name of Jesus, connection to His person and work, that one is saved from God's judgment and wrath and receives the gift of the Spirit and becomes a part of God's new temple. Peter makes it clear that no one else provides this salvation. It's not through the sacrifices offered in the temple. It's not through good works. It's not through the religious leaders here or any other

religious leaders throughout human history. There's one pathway to God's presence and rescue from God's wrath.

All religions do not lead to the top of the same mountain. Allah is not just another name for the God of the Bible. It may seem arrogant to claim to have the one pathway to eternal life, but that's exactly what Jesus is. If He truly rose from the dead, He's it. One author put it like this:

*"While it might be possible to square some religions with each other, particularly those with multiple gods, Christianity is like a puzzle piece drawn from the wrong set: however hard we try to bend the edges, it won't fit."* - Rebecca McLaughlin

And this is the belief that bolstered the Apostles to stand boldly like this despite intimidating and powerful opposition. They were committed to Jesus alone. And this commitment led them to witness to the truth.

### **3. Compelled to Bear Witness (vv. 13-22)**

Look how the Sanhedrin respond. Verse 13. Peter and John weren't scholars and they weren't formally trained students of the Hebrew Bible. They were simple fisherman, but notice that they had been with Jesus. They had been taught by Jesus. They had followed Him and been in His presence. This makes all the difference and gives them the clarity and boldness they exhibit here. But while they also recognize that they are dealing with untrained laymen, they also recognize that there's not much they can say in response. Why? Look at verse 14.

There's every reason to believe the members of the Sanhedrin themselves had seen this man over the years sitting and begging beside the temple. They may have even known his name. And now he's standing there. I'd be standing too and not sitting if I was this guy.

They need a minute. Look at verses 15-17. It's amazing isn't it? They admit to a notable sign, but then want to shut down the Apostles interpretation of that sign. Here's one author's explanation: *"They have just been invited to join the kingdom of God but choose to ignore the invitation, keeping their position as political and religious leaders and remaining in opposition to the very God they claim to serve. Their solution is to censure the apostles, forbidding them from talking about Jesus."* – Brian Vickers

Look at verse 18. We all believe we are rational and simply follow clear evidence but that's just not the case most of the time. We follow our desires and then accept "evidence" that helps us to feel better about what we desire. It's true across the board and even is still true of followers of Christ. Be aware of how your desires are shaping your interpretation of events. The Sanhedrin want to stay in power and so they deny what is right in front of them to keep their positions.

Peter and John fire back. Look at verses 19-20. Notice that they make the issue of who one listens to. This takes us back to Acts 3:22-23 which take us back to Moses. Who will you listen to? Should the Apostles listen to God or the Sanhedrin? This clearly puts the religious leaders on the opposite side of this issue than God. They have refused to hear God's prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, and so will be cut off from God's people.

For the Apostles there's no choice but to listen to God and speak of what they have seen and heard. This is the definition of a witness and a witness must continue to speak even when opposition makes it challenging.

Those with the cultural power ultimately couldn't control the situation. The Gospel will not be hemmed in. Look at verses 21-22.

The contrast in this story between the old Jewish leadership and the new leadership of the Church couldn't be more stark. And the central dividing issue was a commitment to the name of Jesus and trust in His person and work. Whether or not you are facing opposition and conflict for your faith right now, let Christ be the center of your life. He's the only cornerstone and He's continuing to work and build His church in and through opposition. Let's pray.

### Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/3/24

- Explain the connection between underlying beliefs and boldness.
- List some other examples in the book of Acts where the Gospel faced opposition.
- How does the story in chapter 4 of Acts relate to the story in chapter 3?
- Why is it so vital to stress that Jesus is the reason for the conflict the Apostles faced in chapter 4?
- What are some other issues that cause conflict for Christians outside of Christ?
- What is the significance of Peter's statement in verse 11 that Jesus is the cornerstone?
- Acts 4:12 states that Jesus is the exclusive means of salvation. What would you say to someone in our culture who believes that all roads lead to God or that all religions basically teach the same thing?
- Why do you think the Sanhedrin clearly saw the reality of the healed man and still rejected Jesus as the risen Lord?
- Do you agree with this statement? "We all believe we are rational and simply follow clear evidence but that's just not the case most of the time."

We follow our desires and then accept ‘evidence’ that helps us to feel better about what we desire.” Why or why not?

- In what ways does this story contrast the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem and the Apostolic leadership of the church?
- What’s one truth from this text that you can use to encourage or help another believer this week?