

4:1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them,
4:2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The apostles continued to live as observant Jews, attending set seasons of worship in the temple in Jerusalem (Bruce, 83). The healing of the lame man (Acts 3) had provided the opportunity for Peter to proclaim Jesus, and his message stirred a reaction in the leaders in the temple area.

The captain of the temple guard was responsible for maintaining order in the temple court and the large gathering would have been a concern that people would become disruptive.

The Sadducees were one of the key sects in Judaism and claimed to have roots back to Zadok, the high priest under Solomon (I Ki. 2:26-27, 35). They were an aristocratic group and had a very materialistic world view. They were not concerned about the details of the law, as the Pharisees were, nor did they believe in any of the oral traditions held by them. Theologically, they denied the resurrection of the dead (Lk. 20:27-40; Acts 23:6-10), but believed that the soul ceased to exist at death.

In verse 2 it states that the leaders were specifically annoyed for two reasons: (1) teaching about Jesus and (2) teaching about the resurrection. A man had just been healed in Jesus' name, which if true, would show for certainty that Jesus had risen. A dead man can't heal anyone.

"The Sadducees particularly disliked Christians because they claimed to have concrete evidence of the resurrection in the case of Jesus. That this teaching should be going on in the temple made the crime all the worse in their eyes, so they had the apostles arrested as they had the legal right to do in the case of what might be regarded as a breach of the peace in the temple precincts" (Marshall, 104).

Their reaction to the apostles' teaching was in part due to their theology, but was also probably motivated by the social and political relationship they had with Rome. Whenever large groups of people gathered, there was the potential for rebellion against Rome which would be detrimental to the good standing that they were presently in.

4:3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

4:4 But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

"Since it was too late in the day to do anything more, the apostles were given a night in prison, no doubt with the hope that it might sober them up and give them a warning. Nevertheless, Luke emphasizes that the attack on the apostles in no way hindered the effectiveness of their evangelism. Many who had listened to Peter responded to the message, so that the total Christians now reached about 5000" (Marshall, 104, 105).

The growth of the early church occurred in three different arenas. There was public preaching, preaching in the synagogue, and the testimony of believers as they gathered together in houses and in the temple area to worship.

4:5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 4:6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

The next day the leadership gathered to consider a response to what had happened. Those who were present suggest that it was the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling body) that was meeting – at least in part. Annas served as high priest from 6AD – 14 AD, but was the patriarch of the priestly family that held this position for several decades. Caiaphas was the current high priest who served the entire time that Pilate ruled over Judea. John replaced Caiaphas in 37AD. Alexander is unknown. Annas and Caiaphas had also been present at Jesus' trial, and they now realized that the teaching of Jesus could not be easily stopped.

4:7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

They asked the apostles by what authority these things were done in the temple; they clearly had not received permission from the Jewish leaders.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, commented that at this type of hearing the inquirers formed a half-circle around the ones being questioned so that they could see each other.

4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 4:9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 4:10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

In Luke 21:12-15 Jesus had promised that words to speak would be given to the apostles by the Spirit when the need arose. Peter's response fulfills this promise. He is filled with the Spirit and without apology states that if the leaders want to know ***how this man has been made well*** he will tell them; ***by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene . . . this man stands here before you in good health.***

Once more, Peter seizes the opportunity to preach Christ. He begins by asking if they were on trial for doing a good deed – healing a man who was once lame. Normally, good deeds are rewarded, not a reason to be put in jail and stand trial.

The man was healed by Jesus, the servant of God whom He had raised from the dead. If Jesus is raised from the dead, the leaders are enemies of God, for they are those who crucified Him. If Peter's preaching is aligned with the will and plan of God, then his arrest is a further indictment against the leaders.

4:11 "He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone.

Verse 11 is a quote from Psalm 118:22. Psalm 118 is a psalm of joy that includes both the prediction of the reign of the Messiah (Ps. 118:25-26 cf. Matt. 21:9; Jn. 12:13) and His rejection (Ps. 118:22). It was well known by the people of Israel and was sung by the Levites at Passover to celebrate the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Carson, Commentary of the NT use of the OT, 1027).

The Jews' blindness to this psalm is hard to understand. We know a messianic interpretation of the "foundation stone" in Isaiah existed before the writing of the NT. Nevertheless, the scribes and priests could not see that the same stone was rejected in Psalm 118. This fact is borne out in Matthew 21:33-46 (cf. Lk. 20:9-19). After hearing Jesus tell the parable of the evil tenants who killed the son of the owner of the vineyard and declare that the owner would destroy the tenants and rent the vineyard to someone else, the people responded in horror - "May it never be!" (Lk. 20:16). Though they couldn't help but admit that for such a sin the punishment was just and what might be expected, they could not bear to hear of it. Jesus' response to their horror was to quote from Psalm 118:22-23, Daniel 2:34, and Isaiah 8:14-15 and ask what these passages mean (Lk. 20:17). The assumption is that what should happen to the tenants of the vineyard is self-evident for the Scriptures themselves say: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Psa. 118:22). Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls (Isa. 8:14-15), it will scatter him like dust" (This is also probably an allusion to Daniel 2:34 that refers to a stone not cut by human hands that comes from a mountain, which is later identified as a kingdom that crushes all the other kingdoms.) Jesus then concludes that the kingdom of God shall be taken from the Jews and given to a nation yielding its fruits (Matt. 21:43).

Paul used the same verse with the same application in Romans: "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed.'" (Ro. 9:30-33).

That which humanly speaking could not happen, did! The Gentiles who were not looking for righteousness are the ones who attained it. On the other hand, the Jews who tried to attain righteousness didn't because they tried to get it by their own strength instead of faith. They refused to submit to the method of justification that God proposed. They stumbled over Christ, the Rock, who is the foundation of true faith and life.

“We too readily overlook how fundamentally divisive Jesus Christ is, even though the point is repeatedly made not only in the NT but in the OT prophecies concerning Him” (Carson, Commentary of the NT use of the OT, 1026). In encountering Christ, people are changed. Some respond positively, others do not. Those who reject the Stone do not find salvation, but will instead find that the stone they rejected will crush them. Those who accept Him are not disappointed. The Lord provided a foundation stone for the nation of Israel and placed it in Zion (Jerusalem), but Israel completely missed it. The same stone exists today and all who reject it, whether Jew or Gentile, do so at their own peril.

4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Verse 12 is Peter’s theological conclusion to his speech. Simply put, the stone that was rejected has become the chief cornerstone; therefore, there is nowhere else to turn for salvation. What he means is expanded upon in the clause following “for;” ***there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*** Men *must* be saved through Christ if they are to be saved at all. There is no other road or way to God.

This is a very bold statement considering that Peter, a fisherman, is instructing the religious elite about what is necessary to be saved.

4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

4:14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

The leaders couldn’t help but notice the confidence of Peter and John. They were also amazed at their competence considering that they lacked a formal education and were untrained in oratory. They recognized that they had been taught by Jesus.

Not only did the Sanhedrin have to deal with the apostles, they also had to deal with the man who was healed. The man was well known to the people in the temple, and the healing unquestionable. He had recovered to full health.

If the lame man was present, it meant that either he was arrested or the trial took place in public; Luke doesn’t tell us which it was. Whatever the case, there was nothing they could say so they decided to discuss the situation among themselves in private.

4:15 But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another,

4:16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

4:17 "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

The Sanhedrin was in a dilemma. On the one hand, an undeniable miracle had taken place and it had taken place in public. On the other hand, they had to deal with the apostles so that their teaching wouldn't spread. The people had seen what had happened; to deny it would discredit the leaders and draw suspicion from the people. Their solution was to threaten the apostles with more severe consequences should they continue to proclaim Jesus.

4:18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

They accused Jesus of blasphemy, but it was difficult to come up with charges as to what the disciples were doing that was illegal; therefore, they simply commanded the apostles not to teach or speak in Jesus' name anymore. The goal is to bring the testimony about Jesus to a halt. "This is damage control. It also sets the apostles up for further punishment if they refuse what is in effect an initial warning that can lead to contempt-of-court charges later" (Bock, 198).

"The authorities realized that the apostles were acting in the same way as Jesus had done, but because of the popular support for them were unable to take stern measures. They contented themselves, therefore, with issuing a warning to the apostles to stop their teaching, an action which led to a bold denial of their competence to issue such a command by Peter. The church cannot obey orders to give up its most characteristic activity, witness to the risen Lord, although it must be prepared to pay the price of its refusal to keep quiet" (Marshall, 103).

4:19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

4:20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

The apostles replied by stating that they cannot be silent about what they had seen and heard. The leaders needed to realize that the apostles were bound to obey God, not them. The Sanhedrin no longer represented the will and way of God, Jesus did. Jesus had said, "you will be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8), and His words proved to be more than a wish; they were prophetic.

Man should not obey men, even their superiors, when asked to do something contrary to the will of God. "Of course, the council would be shocked by such a distinction, but this is the crux of the dispute. Who better represents God? For Luke, the apostles have the healing on their side, as well as God's activity in raising Jesus" (Bock, 199).

4:21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

4:22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

"This," says a Jewish scholar, "was the first mistake which the Jewish leaders made with regard to the new sect. And this mistake was fatal. There was probably no need to arrest the Nazarenes, thus calling attention to them and making them martyrs. But once arrested, they should not have been freed so quickly. The arrest and release increase the number of believers; for these events showed on the one hand that the new sect was a power which the authorities feared enough to persecute, and on the other hand they proved that there was no danger in being a disciple of Jesus. . ." (Klausner, quoted by Bruce, 104).

In sum, this first touch of persecution against the apostles shows that the Jewish leadership's reaction to God's activity is completely inadequate. Here is an obvious healing that even they recognize. Yet they are concerned not about responding to the apostolic message to which the healing points but about trying to silence the apostles with threats and the use of council power. In the face of such pressure, the apostles are courageous and bold, speaking forth Jesus's uniqueness and making clear that they will obey God no matter what the council threatens. They are willing to suffer for what they believe and to proclaim Jesus in obedience to God.

. . . These first-century Spirit-filled men knew their calling and would not be deterred. They would serve and preach God's way through Jesus, the only one through whom salvation comes. They show that suffering is not to be feared, nor is it necessarily an indication of failure. In fact, it may well come with the territory of sharing the need for Jesus in a world that seeks self-sufficiency (John 15:20). God has not called them to preach a gospel without sacrifice. If Jesus, the servant and example, experienced sacrifice and rejection by many, should those who follow him expect anything different? Those who minister with an appreciation of this truth and let God use his people as his vessels will not fear being poured out in whatever manner God calls for.

There is an exclusiveness to Jesus's work that is not popular today (Acts 4:12). It is seen in our culture as a blow against religious diversity as well as the cause of great religious and political strife throughout history, especially in European history up to the Enlightenment. But a key point is often missed. It is when religion is imposed that it does damage. Here we see the apostles making an appeal and leaving the decision and consequences to individual response. There is no effort to impose the faith, only to inform about it and to stress the responsibility every creature ultimately has to be responsive to the living God. In addition, the offer of Jesus is made to all without discrimination. Thus the exclusiveness of the benefit is directly related to one's willingness or unwillingness to be connected to the benefits. The church's call is to be loyal to God in sharing the message and doing so in such a way that its impact on believers' lives is evident. The call is not to impose the gospel on others. Some will not welcome such a testimony. They are left to go their own way with its tragic consequences. To others, however, the gospel

will supply the sweet savor of real life and will open new vistas to how one can live and have fellowship with God (Bock, 200).

4:23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

When the apostles were released they returned to the community of believers. The believers' response to what had happened was to pray (4:24 ff).

4:24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM,

4:25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?

4:26 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.'

4:27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 4:28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Lord: This is not the usual word employed by which to address God. The word commonly translated "Lord" is κυρίος (kurios). This is the word δέσποτα (despota) from which we get the word "despot." The word used here denotes "one who rules over others," and was applied to the highest magistrate or officer. It denotes "authority; power; absoluteness in ruling." (Barnes)

The prayer begins by confessing God's sovereignty and power. God is acknowledged as Lord; He is the Master of all creation; the one who ultimately has authority over all that happens. "It is God's creation, and so God's lordship is the highest court of appeal. So the disciples pray for God's aid, not in destroying the enemy but for their own role and mission in his world" (Bock, 205).

Verses 25 and 26 quote Psalm 2. The nations "rage," a term used of spirited animals such as horses restlessly stirring and snorting before a race. "This word refers to the excitement and tumult of a multitude; not a settled plan, but rather the heated and disorderly conduct of a mob. It means that the progress of the gospel would encounter tumultuous opposition, and that the excited nations would rush violently to put it down and destroy it" (Barnes).

They also devise "futile things." Futile usually means 'empty,' "as a vessel which is not filled; then "useless," or what amounts to nothing, etc. Here it means that they devised a plan which turned out to be vain or ineffectual. They attempted an opposition to the Messiah which could not succeed. God would establish his kingdom in spite of their plans to oppose it. Their efforts were vain because they were not strong enough to oppose God; because he had purposed to establish the kingdom of his Son; and because he could overrule even their opposition to advance his cause" (Barnes). It is mindless

activity that concludes that man can actually oppose God. The thrust of the Psalm is that opposing God is futile; He made the universes and foreknew man's rebellion against Him.

The Psalm is seen as being fulfilled in "Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel" (v. 27). The point of the Psalm is that the Gentiles and the people are aligned against God and His Messiah. But as verse 28 states, they only did what God's hand and purpose predestined to occur (also see Acts 2:23; 3:18). In other words, even though Jesus' going to the cross involved the sins of Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, nevertheless, it was God's sending. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. As Gill says, "It was not their intention and design to fulfil the purposes and decrees of God, but to fulfil their own lusts, and satiate their rage and malice against Him; but it was so in the event, according to the wise disposal of providence, that by their gathering together, by their consultations and conspiracies they brought about what God in His everlasting council had decreed."

4:29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,

4:30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

Verse 29 shifts to the peoples' request. They ask that God take notice of the threats leveled against the apostles and act on the community's behalf. The believers do not ask that God crush His opponents, nor do they ask that they be spared from persecution. Rather, they ask for boldness and see themselves as God's bondservants.

Verse 30 shows their confidence in God to continue to reveal His power through the miraculous works of the apostles.

4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Three signs from God occur when the prayer is completed: (1) The place where they were gathered shook (this was "a symbol of the divine presence, and a token that their prayers were heard" – Gill), (2) they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and (3) they began to speak the word with boldness.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by Him. This is not a second blessing or the baptism in the Spirit, as in Acts 2. It is control by the Spirit, a fresh filling that enables them to speak boldly.

In sum, this prayer is an expression of complete dependence on God, a recognition of his sovereignty, a call for God's justice and oversight in the midst of opposition, for an enablement for mission, and for the working of his power to show that God is behind the preaching of the name of Jesus in healing and signs. The prayer has roots in Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 37:16–20. It is a mark of success for the community that in preaching the word its members have walked the path of Jesus and have suffered rejection. The reliance on God, the resting in God's justice,

the willingness to suffer persecution, the desire to preach Jesus, and the call to God to show himself – all are signs of a healthy community. The presence of rejection and opposition is not a surprise, nor is it sought, but suffering is embraced when it comes from God. Turning to God leads to boldness.

The community's members, as their leaders have done, will obey God and proclaim the name of Jesus. They will not be silent about the unique way God has chosen to save. Their gathering together for prayer is a major expression of their unity. United in one voice before the one God, they seek to do the one thing God has called on them to do, namely, to minister and to proclaim the work of God through Jesus. All of this is rooted in two key convictions: (1) The Lord – servant relationship between God and his followers and (2) the focus on accomplishing a key mission God has called the community to do – to share the name of Jesus and God's work through Him. The early believers' self-understanding and dependence on God lead them to face opposition with boldness. They also face it together, not in a series of individual efforts where each acts on one's own. This unity in community gives them added strength to know they are not alone in the cause. God responds with enablement for the community. The word is both preached and lived, but most important, the people of God are enabled for the task God calls them to undertake. The best way to face opposition is through what God provides (Bock, 210, 211).