

# 5

## CLASH OF LOYALTIES

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### ACTS 4:1-31



What was it about the early Christian message that got the authorities, and others too, so alarmed and angry? Wouldn't it be great news to know that God was alive and well and was providing a wonderful rescue operation through his chosen Messiah? Answer: not if you were already in power! Not if you were one of the people who had rejected and condemned that Messiah. And not, particularly, if you were in charge of the central institution that administered God's law, God's justice, and the life of God's people, and you strongly suspected that this new movement was trying to upstage you, to diminish or overturn that power and prestige, and take it for itself.

### RESURRECTION + JESUS = TROUBLE (4:1-22)

1. The Sadducees<sup>1</sup> did not approve of Peter's 2<sup>nd</sup> sermon in Acts 3. Why were they "greatly annoyed"? List reasons both from this text and from the context. (Hint: compare the names mentioned in verse 6 with the those mentioned on the night of Jesus' betrayal in John 18:12-24)
2. The Sanhedrin did not doubt that a healing had occurred; they only demanded to know by what authority the apostles were preaching and healing. According to 4:8-12, what did Peter claim about Jesus?

#### HUMILIATION OF CHRIST

As the church begins to experience persecution, they are fulfilling what Jesus predicted (John 15:18-21). Jesus' life was filled with rejection, loneliness, poverty, hunger, temptation, and suffering. Only those who take Jesus at his word (John 12:25; 15:11; Mark 8:34-38) would choose such a life.

<sup>1</sup>The **SADDUCEES** were Jewish aristocrats, including the high priest and his family, who for some years had wielded great power in Jerusalem and among the Jewish people. That's why they strongly disapproved of the idea of a resurrection. Resurrection was a radical, dangerous doctrine, if God is going to suddenly put everything right once and for all, they cannot guarantee that they will end up in power in the new world that God is going to make.

3. What do the authorities ask Peter and John, and how does Peter respond? How, as Christians, should we think and act regarding human authorities? (If you have known the tension between listening to God and listening to people, please share it with the group.)
4. Acts 4:12 is one of the most popular verses in the Bible for presenting the promise of the gospel. What “names” do people call on today in hopes of being rescued from their problems? How can we respond to these viewpoints?

## OPPOSITION + JESUS = OPPORTUNITY (4:23-31)

Those who gather after Peter and John are released pray from the second Psalm<sup>2</sup>, a text which stands within a long Jewish tradition in which God places his chosen people amidst the warring and violent nations of the earth as a sign of his coming kingdom. All this will come through the Messiah as the Son of God, by whose rule he will eventually bring peace and justice to the world.

5. How we pray, what we pray, and why we pray reveal what we believe about God, ourselves, and the world around us. What do the believers confess about God in this prayer (4:23-30)? Write down as many observations as you can.

6. The believers make three requests in verses 29-30. List them below. What do these requests tell us about the believer’s priorities? What about you? What are your prayers saying about where your priorities lay?

### DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). His providential dominion is over all things (Prov 16:9; Jam 4:13-15). He oversees kings and kingdoms down to the timing of our lives and the places we live. God powerfully, wisely, and lovingly governing all things.

<sup>2</sup>In the Bible, **PRAYER** changes the way God acts (Jam 4:2), is made possible only through our mediator, Jesus (1 Tim 2:5), and is supported by the Holy Spirit who helps us in our praying (Rom 8:26-27). The prayer we find in Acts 4:23-30 is supported by Psalm 2 because praying the scriptures encourages us to trust God’s will and ensures that our prayers agree with God’s will.