

PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE COUNCIL

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 4:1-31.

LESSON 283 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1)

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 4:1-31 ¹ And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

² Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

³ And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

⁴ Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

⁵ And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

⁶ And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred 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 ye done this?

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

⁹ If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

¹⁰ Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

¹¹ This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Imprisoned and Arraigned

1. The rulers of the Jews were aroused by Peter's and John's preaching, Acts 4:1, 2.
2. The two disciples were placed in prison for the night, Acts 4:3.
3. Many souls were added to the body of believers, Acts 4:4.
4. The council was called, and Peter and John were brought before it, Acts 4:5-7.

II The Astounded Council

1. The Spirit of God put words of wisdom in Peter's answer, Acts 4:8-12.
2. The council marvelled at these bold Christians, but no accusation could be brought against them, Acts 4:13, 14.
3. The rulers charged Peter and John to speak no further in Jesus' name, Acts 4:15-18.
4. Peter declared that the disciples of Christ must hearken unto God, rather than unto men, Acts 4:19-22.

III With Their Own Company

1. The released disciples went directly to their own company, Acts 4:23.
2. They prayed for boldness to speak God's Word, Acts 4:24-30.
3. God answered their prayer with visible evidences, Acts 4:31.

NOTES:

Victory

The healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple attracted a great crowd of people. Peter quickly saw the door of opportunity that God had opened, and he began to preach to the people about Jesus, the One who made the healing of the lame man possible. As Peter spoke of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, the Spirit of God drove the truth of Peter's words home to the hearts of the hearers, and many of them believed on the Lord. It was an outstanding victory for the Apostles, but hardly had the victory been won when the adversary put in his counter-attack. The assailants came upon Peter and John from three sources: the priests, the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees. The two men of God were apprehended and placed in prison over night, for it was too late in the evening for the Jewish council to be called together before nightfall.

Persecution

Thus the first persecution of the newly founded Christian faith was launched. As the lesson is studied, it will be noted how

become the head of the corner.

¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

¹⁴ And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

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 that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them *is* manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny *it*.

¹⁷ But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

¹⁸ And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

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

²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all *men* glorified God for that which was done.

²² For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

²³ And being let go, they went to

triumphantly Christ's cause and faith in Him stood the storm. Here is a demonstration of the victories that faith in the Son of God has wrought through the ages, no matter how many are the persecutors nor how great a worldly position they may hold. "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (II Corinthians 2:14).

The night fell upon Peter and John in prison – an experience new to them, but an experience that was to become common to the followers of the lowly Nazarene. Even today in some of the countries of the world the very mention of faith in Jesus Christ is considered sufficient cause for dire threatenings, persecutions, imprisonment, or execution. During the Dark Ages many millions suffered martyrdom for the cause of Christ, but it has been said that more Christians have been martyred during the past 25 years than during all the Dark Ages. The Apostles suffered in this first raging of the devil's tempest against Christianity – a preview that holds true to the present day, in fact and in measure. This Land of Liberty in which we live still gives us religious freedom, for which we are thankful, but that could be changed almost overnight if the improper persons were placed in power.

Before the Council

On the morrow, the rulers, the elders, the scribes, the high priest and many of his kindred were called together in council – a very awesome group of the governing body of Jerusalem. Peter and John were called in before this council to answer to the charges of healing a man who had been lame from his birth. Both men, no doubt, remembered a very similar gathering of many of these same men, just a few months previous. That meeting had been the one wherein Jesus stood in mock trial and was sentenced to die upon the cross. Peter must have remembered that event in all its details, because that day the charges of a servant girl cause Peter to deny the Lord. This was a new Peter who stood before this council, however, for a great change had transpired in his heart and life. Peter had wept bitterly and repented wholeheartedly for that denial, and Jesus had forgiven him, restoring salvation to his heart. Peter had followed on with Jesus, consecrating his life to the cause of Christ, making his choice for Him rather than for the things of the world. Peter's heart had been sanctified, for on the Day of Pentecost he was in one accord with the 120 disciples in the Upper Room and there, with them, he had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps the council had expected Peter and John to quail before them in fright; but Peter and John displayed great boldness, as well as giving a forthright account of the hope that was infused in every fibre of their being.

Envious Motives

The miracle of healing could not be denied. The man himself stood with Peter and John, and the miracle argued for itself. Consequently, the trial became an inquiry as to how the miracle was brought about – a fact that every member of the council should have known. This was the critical point. The high priest and his company had crucified Jesus. If the Apostles were allowed to preach unmolested about the risen Christ, then they would bring disrepute to the high priest and the guilt of Christ's blood upon the heads of His accusers. Further, the priests ruled the Temple, and they were envious of the power and influence that they saw the Apostles gaining as they preached Christ's

their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

²⁴ And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

²⁵ Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

²⁶ The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

²⁷ For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

²⁸ For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

²⁹ And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

³⁰ By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

doctrine. The Temple authority would become less and less if the Gospel was allowed to spread unhindered.

The Sadducees, too, took a forward part in the persecution, because the doctrine of the resurrection went exactly counter to their empty belief. There was no resurrection in their dogma, neither angels, nor spirits. The Sadducees were doomed to defeat if the Apostles were allowed to continue preaching.

The Burning Truth

Jesus had warned His disciples that trials would come. He had said: "They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12). Jesus promised more: "Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist" (Luke 21:14, 15). That promise was fulfilled as Peter and John stood before the council to answer the charges brought against them.

The Apostles preached, the Truth of God burned into the hearts of the listeners, and they were left without one word of accusation. It was a sharp sermon that Peter preached, aimed directly at the men who had crucified Jesus. A strong, clear, concise statement concerning Jesus and His mission outlined Peter's defence, then he pressed home the sin of turning the Saviour aside, and he closed the defence with the invitation to salvation for all, by saying, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Having Learned of Jesus

The company with the high priest could not overlook the fact that the Apostles had been with Jesus and learned of Him. They remembered the quiet confidence that Jesus had in God, and now the Apostles displayed that same confidence. The story of Jesus was true, in spite of all that the high priest might say. The resurrection could not be denied, but how gladly would this council have denied it! The Christians pointed to the empty tomb, and the rulers new deep in their heart that the tomb was empty indeed. The whole Christian religion could have been overthrown with one stroke if the rulers could prove that Jesus had not risen from the grave; but they could not. The risen Saviour gave Peter his foundation to speak, and the Holy Ghost gave him his power to speak. The council "could say nothing against it."

Why do men fight against the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? -- the only source of good that men can hope to find in the world. The council was convinced of the Truth, yet they persisted in their rebellion against God. The pride of their heart prevented them from yielding to the convictions of their consciences. The men of the world follow on in the same pattern. God convinces men of the right way and what He expects of them, but they refuse to go that way. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). No sin will ever enter Heaven.

Hearkening unto God

When the council saw that they could not rightfully punish the Apostles, they reasoned that they might silence them with threats. They commanded Peter and John not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus – a charge that fell on unheeding ears. The Christian conscientiously obeys the laws of magistrates and governments so long as they do not conflict with the laws of God. Peter and John answered the council, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Every honest-thinking person will say that it is most important to obey God.

“Right in the sight of God.” That is the goal and ambition of every Christian. A minister of the past century said: “Here, then, ought to be our rule – to do the right. The right, not the profitable; the right, not the pleasant; the right, not the fashionable; the right, not that which leads to earthly honour. And to know what is right we must betake ourselves, not to any human statute book, but to the divine law – for the Christian rule is, to do that which is right in the sight of God.”

To Their Own Company

The council further threatened Peter and John, then let them go. As soon as they were set free, they came to their own company to report all that the chief priests and elders had said. The report brought forth a spontaneous prayer from all who heard of the threatenings. The company of disciples did not pray for revenge to be rained upon their persecutors, but they prayed for more boldness to speak God’s Word. They asked that more miracles of healing might be accomplished, “that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.” Earnestly the company prayed; for when they prayed, “the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” God chose to answer this prayer with a manifest witness, but any man who honestly prays a similar prayer can be sure that the prayer will be answered. God will witness to his heart. God will help the man who really desires to speak the Word of God with boldness.

Pure Religion

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:12). The Christian has learned that he cannot earnestly carry out his religious convictions without meeting opposition of some sort from the men of the world. The opposition may be only a sneer or a jest; it may mean dismissal from a position; or it may cause the failure of promotion to a higher position; it may take on the form of a series of petty annoyances, or it may amount to open opposition; but one thing is sure: the world will not take sincere Christianity graciously, because it condemns the heart of those who observe it. All God’s children can trust their heavenly Father to bring them through the trial with flying colours. The trial may cost a lot of prayer; but when it is over, the man of God will be able to speak the Word with more boldness. And what could be more profitable?

Another thing worthy of note: Christ’s disciples reminded the council of Christ Himself. The man is not a true Christian unless his deportment, his conversation, and his general activity remind

the world of Jesus. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Some people live carelessly outside the church precincts, and their conduct toward the world is reproachful; yet they profess great spirituality when among Christian friends. That is not true religion. Christianity is not a religion of dress parade, to be observed only occasionally when at its best. True Christianity is just as liveable on Monday as it is on Sunday, and it will always bear investigation. At all times and in every place, true Christianity will show forth its Author and Sustainer.

QUESTIONS

1. Why were Peter and John cast into prison? Who put them there?
2. Name some of the men who sat in the council against Peter and John. Have we heard of these men before?
3. What was the question that the council used as a basis of trial against the Apostles?
4. How did Peter answer the question?
5. What two things in Peter's and John's manner caused the council to marvel?
6. How did the council try to stop the Apostles from preaching about Jesus?
7. In what way can we apply to our Christian lives the rule of obedience that Peter set forth to the council?
8. What did the company of disciples do when they heard about the threatenings of the council?
9. How did God manifest His answer?