

Because chapters and verses are not a part of God's word, but rather were added as a means of referencing, we have to consider the context of chapter three in order to understand and interpret chapter four. Peter and John were on their way to the temple at the afternoon time of prayer. Just outside the temple, Peter pronounced healing, in Jesus' name, for a man who had been born crippled.

The once crippled man stood up, and ran into the temple, jumping, and praising God. Any thing other than a miracle from God could not describe his new condition. The people knew the man. As we learn from tonight's passage he was over forty years old. Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, used the occasion of the miracle to preach the gospel to all of the eyewitnesses.

This was the second recorded sermon that Peter preached, after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. The substance of his message included the truth that Jesus was the Messiah. The Jews failed to recognize Him, and instead had Him killed. But because Jesus is the Christ, He rose from the grave, ascended into heaven, sent the Holy Spirit, and has become Savior, Lord, and the means by which God judges the sin of all people. With a strong emphasis on repentance, Peter then called his listeners to trust Jesus as Savior and Lord.

People back then responded to the good news of Jesus Christ the same as they do today. When we share the gospel, and people are confronted with their sin, some repent and turn to Christ in faith. Others resist God's offer of grace, and oppose the messenger as well as the message. The greater emphasis, in tonight's passage, is on the opposition to the gospel and how the religious leaders reacted to Peter's message. Let's see what lessons we can learn by reading together Acts 4:1-22.

The first things we notice in this passage is that a group of men interrupted Peter and John while they were still speaking to the people. This gives us insight that John was giving a witness as well as Peter, and that there was a group who could not stand to hear their message. Whenever the gospel is preached or shared today, some will find its message repulsive. The gospel shakes their world. It confronts them with their sin, and calls for a decision. Sharing Christ results in a new life for those who believe, but some would rather hold on to their sin, and their way of life. The appeal to their flesh is stronger in their hearts than the appeal to their souls, and they will resist, and oppose, the gospel at all costs.

To understand their opposition, we must consider who stopped Peter and John from sharing Jesus. Verse one tells us that they were priests, the captain of the guard, and the Sadducees. In order to be a priest, a man had to be a Levite, and be able to prove by his lineage that he was a direct descendent of Levi. We know that the priests were trained and equipped for service in the temple, and thus received their training from the Temple Rulers, who were the Sadducees. The captain of the temple guard, if not a Sadducee himself, was at least employed by the Sadducees. Many of the Sadducees were also Levites, although some people became Sadducees through political appointment, or placed themselves among the Sadducees as a means of becoming connected politically, and economically.

The Sadducees were the wealthy, upper class, in Jerusalem. They were loyal to Rome because they derived their wealth, and power, from their association with the Romans, and from the fact that they were the administrators of all Temple worship. The Pharisees accepted the whole of the Old Testament as the word of God, but the Sadducees only used the first five books of the bible, which they called the books of Moses.

They did not believe in the resurrection, so they refused to believe that Jesus arose from the dead. They did not believe in angels or spirits, so they did not believe the evidence of the coming of the Holy Spirit. They liked things the way they were. As a friend of mine used to say, they were walking in high cotton, and they were not going to let these men threaten their wealth, or their power.

Under these circumstances, you can see why they were greatly disturbed, because the Apostles were teaching the people concepts, which opposed their own beliefs, and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. To put it another way, Peter and John were saying that if a person surrenders his or her life in faith, to the Lord Jesus Christ, he or she would be raised with Christ to eternal life.

Peter and John were turning the people's hearts away from the Sadducees, and toward Jesus. If the people followed Jesus, and this new teaching, the Sadducees might lose their power, and in time, their income. They were losing control, and this greatly disturbed them. Who knows what might happen if they did not stop this radical teaching?

Unfortunately, I can see this same attitude in churches and denominations that are in competition with each other today. Don't misunderstand me. Doctrine is important and we must not compromise on the clear principles of God's word, because there are so many false doctrines in the world today. But, so much of what divides brothers and sisters in Christ has to do with doctrines developed, where there is room for differences in interpretation. End times doctrine is a key example. Some people become so dogmatic in their beliefs about prophecy that they become downright mean in the way they treat fellow Christians who come to a different understanding of Prophetic Scripture. Many years ago we had a family leave the church when the man did not agree with Bro. Carl as he taught through the book of Revelation, even though time and again our pastor said you do not have to agree with me on every interpretation in order to be a happy member of this church. In the larger arena of his media ministry, I have seen people who treated him as a brother in Christ, and a great friend, turn on him viciously, because of something that he said in his book countered what they taught, and threatened their following, and income stream.

So what did the Sadducees do when Peter and John taught the principles of the gospel? They threw them in jail of course. But notice what else happened. Many who heard the gospel message believed and the church grew to about five thousand. Here in America, we have not faced opposition to sharing the gospel the way our brothers and sisters have in the past, or the persecution other believers face in foreign countries today. But even if we must suffer for our faithful testimony, God will not let His word return void, and people will get saved.

After Peter and John spent the night in jail, the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met, in Jerusalem. This was the Sanhedrin council, and perhaps other influential leaders in the city. Caiaphas was the actual current High Priest, and Annas was his father-in-law, who was a former high priest, and the real power behind everything. John and Alexander were other members of the family who profited from the family business involved with temple worship, which included selling suitable animals for sacrifices, and exchanging money at a great profit, in order for the people to give their tithes, and offerings with the specific coins used in the temple. They sent for Peter, and John, and demanded to know by what power, or by what name did you do this. In other words, by what authority do you speak things that are contrary to the ways of the Sadducees?

Notice that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he gave his response. The Holy Spirit gave Peter the words to speak, just as Jesus had taught the disciples, while He was still with them. He begins with irony. They are being persecuted for doing something good. Then

Peter uses the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Sanhedrin Council. Jesus' name is the power behind the miracle. They crucified Him, but God raised Him from the dead.

No matter how great the opposition, we also must stand upon the truth. Other people's beliefs do not change the truth. If others say that there are many ways to heaven, we stand upon the gospel that we are saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, and Him alone. Political correctness and the godless laws of the land should be cast to the ground when they do not agree with God's word. Not that we should break other laws in protest, but that we should take our stand, and speak out.

In verse 12, Peter makes a definitive statement that would have infuriated the religious leaders. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name, under heaven, given to men, by which we must be saved. This single verse encompasses the truth of the gospel, which must be preserved, no matter what the opposition. There is room for interpretation concerning eschatology, but there is no room for compromise when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and upon this gospel we must take our stand.

The religious leaders were in a quandary. How could uneducated, ordinary men speak with such boldness and authority? How could they do this great miracle? The council could not deny the miracle because by now everyone in Jerusalem had heard about the crippled man's ability to now walk, or had seen him with their own eyes. If they did anything more, they might look bad in the eyes of the people, so they warned Peter and John to no longer speak to anyone in Jesus' name.

Already there are many work environments where employees are not allowed to speak to others in Jesus' name, at the threat of losing their jobs. The pressures of political correctness cause professing Christians to hold back from sharing their faith, and I see a day on the horizon where our own government, if left unchecked, will demand that Christians keep their faith to themselves, and not speak in Jesus name out in the public.

What will we do? Will we cower to government pressure, or will we say, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Will we obey the commands of godless men, or will we obey the command of God? Will we abandon the gospel message, or will we be filled with the Holy Spirit, and speak of God's love, and grace, fearlessly.

The bible says that the religious leaders threatened the Apostles, and then threatened them some more. They wanted to punish Peter and John, but they were afraid of the public outcry, because so many were eyewitnesses to the miracle. As we will see in the following passages, the threats made only served to strengthen Peter and John's resolve, so that the gospel continued to go out, and people continued to surrender their life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to, at this point, tell you how proud I am of our pastor for the biblical stands he has taken over the years. It is what first drew me to this church 25 or so years ago. I have been at his side for 16 years as an associate pastor, and I have never seen him waver. I have observed that when the people of God take their stand, God pours out His grace, and protection, and often uses His people to turn the tide.

If we refuse to take our stand on what is true, and right, the enemy will have no opposition. If we do not take our stand, the freedoms we take for granted will be taken away from us. If the miracle of God has happened in you, when you first believed, your testimony is essential for the spread of the gospel. The more people believe, and are willing to take their stand, the more the opposition will be afraid of public outcry, should they try to advance godless agendas.

Abortion is wrong. It is godless, and a plague upon our nation. It will always be wrong, and it will never be right, no matter how long it remains the law of the land. A marriage is between a man and a woman. Homosexuality is sin against God. It will always be sin; it will never be acceptable among people who fear the living God. When leaders cast the truth to the ground, and pass laws that are contrary to the clear teachings of God's word, the truth does not change with the passing of a new law.

We are to be the voice of truth in a world of lies. We are to be the light of Christ in a world of darkness. We must not cower; we must stand on the truth, no matter what. But as Brother Carl reminded us this past Sunday, we can't be jerks in the way we take our stand. We must demonstrate the love, and grace, of the Lord Jesus Christ so that others might see the difference Jesus makes in a believer's life.

Those who profess Christ as Savior and Lord represent a bigger voting block of people than any organized political lobby. But politicians generally pay little attention to Christian concerns, because many either don't vote, or they do not vote based upon a biblical worldview. Government is not afraid of the Christian outcry when it advances some unbiblical agenda, because the majority of Christians either do not care, or they are unwilling to take a stand.

If we are in the last days, there is only so much time left to reach the lost for Christ. If we do not make our voices known, how will we ever stem the tide of godlessness and darkness that is sweeping over our nation, and the world? But if we take our stand together, who knows how God might use us and bless our nation. It has to begin first, for all of us, by a public commitment of our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, and then we must be willing to take a public stand upon His revealed will. If anyone wants to know how to receive Jesus Christ into your heart as Savior and Lord, I am happy to help.