

# Ministry of Grace Church

## The Acts of The Apostles Chapter 4

### Preface:

In the previous chapter we learned about Peter healing a man crippled since birth. As a result, a large crowd gathered around them in the area of the Temple known as Solomon's Porch, where Peter delivered a masterful sermon proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. He reminded the people that they had requested a murderer be released instead of their Messiah. But He also told the people that this was all part of God's plan as revealed by their own prophets. He made the point that Jesus is the Author of Life and that He was raised from the dead.

Peter also reminded them that Moses had predicted that their Messiah would come as a prophet and that there were severe consequences for ignoring His message. Peter explained to them that believing in Jesus as the Messiah would save them individually. He also told them that if the nation were to accept Him, He would return immediately to set up the Messianic Kingdom. (Slide 2)

### Peter and John Arrested

#### **Acts 4:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup>And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, (Slide 2) <sup>2</sup>greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup>And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. <sup>4</sup>But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.**

### Notes:

Within the priesthood of the Jews there was a hierarchy of authority. At the top, was the High Priest, a direct descendant of Arron, the brother of Moses. However, when Rome took over the land of Israel, they didn't like the amount of power wielded by the High Priest. So, the Romans routinely appointed others as High Priest. The High Priests were nearly always selected from among the party of the Sadducees.

Directly under the High Priest was the Captain of the Temple, a priest who was over the Temple Guard. The Guard was made up of 24 bands of priests, who took turns being responsible for guarding the gates to ensure that no unclean person was permitted to enter the Temple.

The next in order of importance and power was the Sanhedrin. This group of 71 men was, in effect, the Supreme Court of the Jewish people. The name, Sanhedrin, means "those who sit together." It was composed primarily of Sadducees, (Slide 3) although the most notable and well-respected Rabbis from the Pharisees were also included. The Sadducees were the political arm of the religious rulers whereas the Pharisees were the Theologians.

It was not a crime to teach in the Temple. Many different Rabbis proclaimed their teaching from the Portico that surrounded the court of the Gentiles. Since most of the Temple hierarchy were Sadducees, it is understandable that they would oppose Peter's teaching. Remember, the Sadducees did not believe in spirit beings and they did not believe in the resurrection. So, when Peter taught that it was by the power of the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth that the lame beggar was healed, it "greatly annoyed" them.

We learned from the previous chapter that Peter and John had gone to the temple at the time of the evening prayer (3:00 PM). And, since it took several hours to get all the Sanhedrin gathered together, they decided to "put them in custody" until the next day.

Notice, however, the real effect of Peter's and John's actions and witness.

But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (Acts 4:4)

In the previous chapter we saw that after the crippled man was healed, Peter preached a sermon and challenged the people to repent because Jesus is the Messiah who had been promised for centuries. Many of those hearing the message believed and the church grew. Now, there is some confusion in this verse. A literal translation of the final phrase of verse 4 is, "and the number of the men became, as it were, five thousand." Here's the confusing part. Did Luke mean that the number of men in the church grew from 3,000 to 5,000, or did he mean that the number of men grew by an additional 5,000, so that the total was now 8,000. Actually, it doesn't really matter. This is one of those phrases that people love to argue about, but the point is that many more people were added to the church because they believed Peter's message.

## **Peter and John Testify Before the Council**

### **Acts 4:5-12**

**<sup>5</sup>On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup>with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup>And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" <sup>8</sup>Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup>if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup>let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup>This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup>And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."**

### **Notes:**

The Sanhedrin was called together on the following day. It consisted of "rulers" (that is, the chief priests, who were all Sadducees), the elders (who were not devoted to either the Pharisees or the Sadducees), and the "scribes," (the teaching Rabbis, who were Pharisees.) Caiaphas was the "official" High Priest, son-in-law to Annas, the high priest who had been removed from office by the Romans. Even though Annas had been displaced by the Romans, many in Jerusalem still considered him to be the High Priest. We have no verifiable information as to who John and

Alexander were. In addition to the official Sanhedrin (Rulers, Elders, and Scribes), the attendees of this “hearing” included family members of the high priestly family. These would all have been Sadducees.

The opening question in this inquisition was, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” (Slide 4A) There was no question as to whether or not this man had been healed. That was obvious because the man was standing in their midst and for years, they had all seen him sitting at the Beautiful Gate. In Luke’s gospel account, when Jesus’ disciples asked Him about the end times, He told them:

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, *and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake*. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. (Luke 21:10-15)

And, in Mark’s gospel account he adds:

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. (Mark 13:11)

Granted, these two passages are specifically about the end times and the Great Tribulation. However, this teaching has much broader application. Any time Christians are arrested and brought before any judicial system, whether it is religious or political, they are to place themselves in the loving care of the Holy Spirit and speak the words given to them. Take special note, however, that this does not guarantee acquittal. It only guarantees that they will be doing the will of the Father.

Peter, having placed himself squarely in the hands of God, replied through the power of the Holy Spirit. He said, in effect, “Are we being put on trial for doing a good deed?” Obviously, no one on the Sanhedrin could condemn them for that, since it was not done on a Sabbath. Peter went on,

“If we’re on trial for doing a good deed, then let it be known to you and all the people of Israel, that this man has been made whole by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, your Messiah. Yes, the very Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified. He is no longer dead; God has raised Him from the dead and it is by faith in His name that this man stands before you completely healed.”

This defense would have immediately both disarmed and enraged all the members of the Sanhedrin who were Sadducees. They didn’t believe in the resurrection, and yet – they couldn’t deny that a miraculous healing had been done.

Having completely disarmed any accusation that they might have had against him, Peter went on to lay down an accusation of his own. He quoted part of Psalms 118, (Slide 4B) a very well-known psalm of celebration and praise. This psalm was sung (or recited) at all the major festivals, in celebration of God’s rescuing Israel from their foes. It is the culmination of the Hallel, or praise, psalms. The portion that Peter quoted,

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (**Psalms 118:22**)

was undeniably directed at the Sanhedrin. This psalm was so well known that everyone in the council would have immediately thought about the lines that followed:

This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD. (**Psalms 118:23-26**)

Keep in mind that the expression, "Save us, we pray" is "Hosanna." This is exactly what was declared when Jesus entered Jerusalem less than 10 weeks earlier.

Since Psalms 118 is a psalm of the Messiah and the salvation that He would provide, Peter finished his message with,

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (**Acts 4:12**)

Peter preached a message that clearly demonstrated that Jesus is the Messiah and that the religious leaders of Israel had rejected him just as had been prophesied. It was a bold condemnation of the religious leaders and one that was well supported by their own scriptures.

## **The Council Warns Them Not to Preach in Jesus' Name**

### **Acts 4:13-22**

**<sup>13</sup>Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup>But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. <sup>15</sup>But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, <sup>16</sup>saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup>But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." <sup>18</sup>So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup>But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, <sup>20</sup>for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." <sup>21</sup>And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. <sup>22</sup>For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.**

### **Notes:**

The council recognized Peter's and John's boldness and they were caught off guard because they perceived that Peter and John were uneducated. (**Slide 5A**) They had not studied under any of the Rabbis, yet they seemed to have a mastery of the Messianic prophecies. They also recognized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. But the council could not condemn Peter and John because what they had done was clearly a miraculous healing.

Not knowing what to do, the Sanhedrin sent Peter and John outside so they could openly discuss what to do to them. When they called Peter and John back inside, they gave them orders to no longer speak or teach in Jesus' name. (Slide 5B) But Peter and John answered,

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. (Acts 4:19-20)

Since they had done nothing illegal, (Slide 6A) Peter and John were released.

## **The Believers Pray for Boldness**

### **Acts 4:23-31**

<sup>23</sup>When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup>And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, <sup>25</sup>who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>26</sup>The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed"— <sup>27</sup>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, <sup>28</sup>to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. <sup>29</sup>And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup>while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." <sup>31</sup>And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

### **Notes:**

As soon as Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin, they reported to the church what had happened. The translation we're reading from here (ESV) says they went to their "friends." This is from the Greek word *idios*, meaning "their own." This is a subtle indication from Dr. Luke that the members of the church no longer considered themselves as just Jews, but as a separate organization. Notice, also, that the immediate reaction of the church was to pray. They started off their prayer with, "Sovereign Lord." This is from the Greek word *despotēs*, from which we get our English word "despot." It refers to someone who has overall supreme authority. It's use in the New Testament is rare, being used only 10 times.

This prayer can be divided into three sections.

- They recognized that God is Sovereign
- They recognized that God's plan includes believers facing opposition
- They asked God to give them boldness in their witness to others

Let's look at these in more detail. First of all, the original church saw God as having supreme authority and power. They recognized that nothing could interfere with God's plan. (Slide 7A) But this means that they also recognized that they, both individually and corporately, were subject to His will. This is both a recognition of God's overall authority and power, and a recognition of their own total lack of authority and power. They saw God for who He really is

and they saw themselves for who they really are (His humble servants). They also recognized that God has a plan which He has predestined (the Greek word means “to predetermine ahead of time”) and nothing can hinder His plan.

Secondly, they recognized that His plan includes opposition from both religious and civil authorities. (Slide 7B) Throughout the ages, the church has faced this opposition with little power of their own.

Finally, as a result of these two, the church recognized that they needed God’s power in the form of boldness. (Slide 7C) This is from the Greek word *parrhesia*, which means “outspokenness, confidence, boldness, and assurance.” The church wanted to be able to speak the truth about God and about Jesus Christ without fear of what would happen to them, knowing that whatever happened was part of God’s supreme plan.

When the church finished their prayer time, the place where they were praying was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice that it does not say, “and many of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” They were **all** “filled” with the Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated “all” is *hapas*, which means “absolutely all of them.”

## **The Church Had Everything in Common**

### **Acts 4:32-37**

**<sup>32</sup>Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.**

**<sup>33</sup>And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup>and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.**

**<sup>36</sup>Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, <sup>37</sup>sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.**

### **Notes:**

The result of all the believers being filled with the Holy Spirit was that they had a unity of heart and soul and – they shared all things in common. Even to the point that when some in the church had a financial need, others sold property and possessions to provide for them.

So, why don’t we do this today?

First, we have to understand that Jews who professed Jesus Christ as Lord, left the fellowship of the Jewish faith and ceased attending Shabbat. They were viewed by those *outside* the Jewish faith as being simply a “sect” of Judaism. However, to those within the Jewish faith, they were seen as deserters and as followers of a false religion. In other words, they were seen as no better than Gentiles. In fact, many considered them as worse than Gentiles. In Acts chapters 7 through 9 we will learn about the persecution of the church members by the leaders of Judaism, including Saul of Tarsus. Eventually, this persecution would get to the point that religious Jews would not have anything to do with Christians. It would eventually become impossible for Christians to transact any business with them. They would even find it impossible to sell possessions because



of the persecution. In the final analysis, Christian Jews had to leave Jerusalem and they were scattered throughout the known world because of the persecution. This mass migration out of Israel by Christians became known as the *diaspora*, or “the dispersion.”

Therefore, we can see that the selling of property and contributing to the needs of others was not only necessary to help those who suffered when they were shunned by the Jews, but it turned out to be God’s protection and provision for them. What do I mean by that? Those who had houses and land and did not sell them when the church was first formed, would not be able to sell at all later, when the persecution increased. These people would eventually flee Jerusalem with nothing but what they could carry with them. Thus, the selling of possessions was not only an act of love on the part of land owners, it was also an act of love on God’s part.

## **So What?**

Let’s look at the prayer that the first church prayed after Peter and John had been released. They started off the prayer referring to God as “Sovereign Lord,” acknowledging His supreme authority. The Greek word normally translated as “lord” or “master” is *kurios*, meaning “one who has power over another: a master or owner.” However, in this prayer they didn’t use the word *kurios*, they used the word *despotēs*, meaning “one who has absolute, or supreme, power.” This is something that seems to be missing in the lives of many Christians today. They readily proclaim Jesus as their Savior, but fail to recognize Him as their Lord, let alone as their “Sovereign Lord.” Let’s not be like that.

The relationship between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man is something that has been debated among theologians for centuries. God is completely sovereign. He has a plan for mankind as a whole and for each individual person, and His plan cannot be thwarted. For instance, according to the book of Ephesians, before the foundation of the world, God chose who would be saved:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love  
(Ephesians 1:3-4)

But that doesn’t absolve us of the responsibility of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in order to be saved. It’s not “either the sovereignty of God or the responsibility of man.” It’s BOTH the sovereignty of God AND the responsibility of man. This cannot be explained in terms that everyone can understand, because it seems impossible. However, it’s no more impossible than God Himself being one God, but being three persons. It doesn’t make sense to our finite brains, but God declares it as truth.

Let me give you another example of God’s sovereignty that we can’t explain away. In the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 23, when David was being pursued by King Saul, he went and saved the city of Keilah from the Philistines. However, when Saul heard about it, he mustered his army to go and capture David in Keilah.

But, when David heard that Saul was pursuing him, he enquired of the Lord, “Will Saul come down to Keilah to capture me?”

And the Lord said, “Yes, he will come down.”

Then, David inquired of the Lord, “will the men of Keilah surrender me into the hand of Saul?”

And the Lord said, “Yes, they will surrender you.”

So David and his men left the city of Keilah and hid from Saul in the wilderness.

So, what does this have to do with the sovereignty of God? Did you notice that God knew that the people of Keilah would surrender David and his men? And yet – it never happened! It never happened because David fled and Saul never went to Keilah.

God knows the future even if it doesn’t happen. He knows what would have happened. Again, this is hard for our finite brains to comprehend, but that’s the sovereignty of God. God’s sovereignty is not just in His actions, it’s in His awareness. He is aware of everything, even what could be.

The early church recognized God’s supreme authority, even in their personal lives. Do we recognize God’s sovereignty in our personal lives? God knows how we’ll react to temptation, even before we’re tempted. As Christians, we tend to focus on God’s grace when it comes to our sins. We know that all of our sins have been paid for by the blood of Jesus. But God is still aware of every one of them.

Think of that “[sin which so easily ensnares us](#),” as the writer of Hebrews calls it. We all have some temptation that constantly trips us up. The typical reaction of today’s Christian seems to land in one of two extremes. Either we beat ourselves up about it and think of ourselves as unworthy to be called His child, or we flippantly excuse it because, “it’s under the blood.” Instead, we should recognize that it’s because of His love for us that He still gladly calls us His precious children. What He’s looking for from us is to recognize that He has every right in the world to tell us how to live our lives. And we have an obligation to submit to His sovereign will in humble obedience.

In their prayers, the early church also recognized that God’s plan for each one of us includes opposition and hardship, even in the lives of His most submitted and obedient children. We tend to look at difficult times in our lives as chastening from God. And, it may well be, if we’ve been trying to run our own lives instead of surrendering to Him. However, opposition and hardships might be God’s way of growing us and preparing us for even greater blessing.

Remember, God wants a relationship with each of His children and any relationship depends on communication, two-way communication. If all God ever hears from us is, “Daddy, I want this,” or “Daddy, I want that,” then we’re nothing more than spoiled children, and we’ll seldom get what we want. God wants us to listen to Him. Remember, I said two-way communication. He wants us to know Him better, He wants us to grow, He wants us to be a blessing to others. But, how can any of those things happen if we never take the time to listen to Him?

As we listen to Him and learn from Him, we will learn more about Him. And, the more we learn about Him, the more we will naturally want to submit to His will, His supreme will.

Finally, the early church asked God to give them boldness in their witness. They didn’t hide behind closed doors. Instead, they sought out opportunities to give witness of their faith and of the power of God. This church right here was started because we refused to let others tell us that we couldn’t meet together. But – have we been hiding behind closed doors? Now that we know that we will be meeting in this building for the foreseeable future, we need to make our presence known. We need to be a witness to the people around us. That means the people in our lives that we encounter on a daily basis as well as the people who live in this neighborhood. We’re about to get a new sign for



this building. That will make our presence known. But how are we going to reach out to the neighborhood? I don't have the answer, that's why I'm asking the question. Those of you who have the gift of Evangelism need to help the rest of us. I would love to see someone step forward and take ownership of our outreach ministry.

### **Now What?**

I would like to challenge each and everyone of us to think and pray about how we as a church can reach the city of Salem for the Lord. Personally, I would love to see us begin a ministry for young married couples and young families. That seems improbable based on our location and the fact that we have few, if any young families in our church at present. But – we have a sovereign Lord who can make that happen. Will you pray with me about this? Will you seek God's face in your prayer time and lay before Him our desire to bring others to Christ?

Let's quit hiding. Let's reach out!

**Let's pray.**

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