

## Acts 4 – The Power of Jesus Challenged

We left Peter and John at the end of chapter 3 preaching in the temple precincts, this was not in itself an offence but in the beginning of chapter 4 we find them being arrested and thrown into prison. The priests, captain of the temple guard (chief of the temple police who was second in rank to the high priest) and the Sadducees were exasperated that they were “proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead”. Luke makes clear that this action of arresting the apostles did not arrest the growth of the church as many who heard believed and the number of men grew to 5000.

The next day the Sanhedrin was gathered together to question Peter and John. Anyone who has read the trial of Jesus will recognise the names of Annas, and Caiaphas; and no doubt the original readers of Acts would have known of the John and Alexander also mentioned. Luke wants us to know that the same people who had condemned Jesus to death were now gathered to deal with Peter and John. The Sanhedrin had 71 members who sat in a semi-circle presided over by the high priest. The apostles were placed in the midst of this intimidating body of men to be questioned. The opening question “By what power or what name did you do this?” indicates that this display of power and authority was part of the strategy of silencing the apostles, They knew the answer because Peter had been preaching that it was by faith in the name of Jesus that the man had been healed but perhaps they were hoping the apostles’ answer would lead to charges of blasphemy. However the way Luke describes the scene and introduces the question highlights the power struggle that is going on.

Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit” boldly declares that the man standing before them healed is evidence that Jesus is risen from the dead and at work amongst them. Indeed “Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”.

The members of the Sanhedrin were astonished by Peter and John, ordinary lay men who spoke with an authority and power which could only be put down to the fact that they had been with Jesus. These Jewish leaders could not deny the man was healed, an outstanding miracle, so all they could do was try some damage limitation, ordering the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus again. But Peter and John did not accept this restriction telling the Sanhedrin to judge whether it was right in God’s sight for them to obey the Sanhedrin rather than God. A question that is relevant for any Christian whose faith puts them in conflict with those in authority.

Peter and John returned to the church and told them what had happened so they all prayed. The prayer that Luke records for us is a very helpful study in how to pray and for what to pray. The church experienced an immediate answer to their prayer but also one that had ongoing impact on the life of the church. “Lord teach us to pray.”

Open

- Can you think of a time when you were put in an intimidating situation before some people who you saw as being very powerful? How did it make you feel?

## Acts

### Study

Read together Acts 4: 1-21 (*We will read the rest of the chapter later.*)

1. What were the two different reactions to what Peter and John were saying? Why were the leaders “greatly disturbed” (“annoyed” ESV)? (Acts 4: 1-4)
2. Who was gathered together to question Peter and John? Why do you think Luke is so specific about who was there? (Acts 4:5-7 see also Luke 22:66)
3. “By what power or what name did you do this?” What does this question tell us about the major concern of these Jewish leaders? (Acts 4:7 see also Luke 20:1-2)
4. Faced with all the power of the Jewish authorities, the same people who had condemned Jesus to death, where does Peter get the courage to answer them? What does he say about Jesus to challenge them to change? (Acts 4:8-12 see also Luke 21:12-15)
5. How did the Jewish leaders respond to what Peter had to say? How does Luke show the shift in power that has taken place? (Acts 4:13-22)

Read together Acts 4:23-36

## Acts

6. Peter and John had been in a power battle with the Jewish authorities, who did they go to for comfort and support? (Acts 4:23-24)
  
7. Looking at the prayer in Acts 4:24-30 what do you see as being the key components of their prayer? What did their prayer say about God and what did they ask for? (see also Psalm 146:6 and Psalm 2)
  
8. How was their prayer answered, immediately and longer term? In what ways did they respond? (Acts 4:31-37)

### Commit

- What were the factors that enabled the apostles to be bold witnesses in this threatening situation? What do we need to overcome our fears about witnessing? (Acts 4:8, 13, 31, and 33)
  
- Acts 4:32-37 describes what happened in the early church not what must happen in every church. But what principles do you think we could learn from this section and how could we apply them in our church?
  
- When the apostles met persecution they prayed. Read Psalm 2, then pray for those who are facing persecution using the prayer in Acts 4 as a prayer guide.