

Acts 4:8-20 (NIV)

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people!

9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed,

10 then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

11 He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone”.

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

15 So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.

16 “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.

17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.

20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

44-04-02-Opposing Opposition

healing, skepticism, bigotry, religion, persecution, obedience
Acts 4:8-20

We must meet unbelief’s resistance with Gospel faith’s persistence.

INTRODUCTION:

–Jesus warned His disciples in Luke 21:12-15, “...they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and **all on account of my name**. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you **words and wisdom** that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. [As a kid, I used to wonder about believers being beheaded in Revelation. *“How can that happen? They don’t do that anymore.”* Well, they do now! ISIS terrorism has even beheaded a priest doing Mass in a French church.] Peter and John, arrested for healing in Jesus’ name, stood before the Sanhedrin. They would be given the “words and wisdom” by Jesus, as they used the key to victory in opposing opposition that all Christians must learn: **HOM.idea. That persistence relies on...**

I. The Reliability of Truth – v.8-12, *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone’. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

- A. Peter, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” said exactly what God wanted the Sanhedrin to hear. (They wanted to preserve *the religious status quo*, but God gave them *a confrontation with truth!*)
- B. In fact, God reversed the situation, putting the Sanhedrin on trial!
 1. Peter told them the truth about the “act of kindness” to the crippled man: “It’s the Jesus ‘whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead’, who is still at work healing people, AS YOU CAN SEE!”
 2. Then he quoted Psa 118:22, The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone (“You are ‘the builders’ who rejected ‘the stone’ God sent to complete His kingdom! Indeed, you killed the Messiah!”)
 3. Lastly, he gave *irrefutable logic*: “Behold the one Jesus healed!”
 - a. #1, if God raised to life “the stone” you killed, then Jesus must be the the Messiah, the human King of God’s eternal kingdom.

- b. #2, if God's Messiah was and still is healing people [Gk word for salvation], then it's obvious: **Jesus is not finished yet!**
- c. #3, if the God's Messiah is still on duty, don't look elsewhere for God's will and plan: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

TRANS: That's a bold, exclusive claim! It may offend unbelievers. But what certainty does unbelief offer? [illus: "This is the only antidote for the poison you drank." "That's biased! It's unfair! It disregards all the other antidotes!" "But it's the only one that can save you!" "How bigoted! I'm not buying it!"] Many don't buy what Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." This resistance might be because of..."

II. The Irrationality of Unbelief—v.13-17, *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."*

A. Did you ever reject something that turned out to be true? [At one time, I felt the bare body was shameful; sinful if seen naked. I was taught this in church and at home, so I defended that thinking, even as an RN seeing hospital nudity routinely. Finally, our society's shameful view of public breastfeeding led me to do research that proved body shame to be a culturally formed idea. I was still not convinced. Then I learned that today's sexualized view of nudity was foreign to the minds of believers living in Bible times and the early church. Truth, historically verified, led me out of body shame into body acceptance.]

B. This was not the case with the Jewish leaders ... when confronted by the facts Peter presented; they maintained a state of denial:

1. Although "astonished" at the "words and wisdom" of Peter, they were focused on him being just like the heretic Jesus they'd crucified.
2. They would have tried to deny the miracle, too, but the healed man stood there in front of them! Denying it would have made them look like fools, and they had to preserve their public image.
3. Loyalty to the religious status quo and to their official place in it blinded them to any miraculous evidence or rational arguments. Truth wasn't their goal; they wanted to get rid of this Jesus faith.

TRANS: Religious or political authorities may resist the truth with irrational arguments or even force. [There have been children disowned by parents for accepting Christ. I've known pastors removed from pulpits for their stand on truth. Believers in North Korea can face torture for sharing the Gospel. Christians hostages under ISIS can be beheaded or burned alive for persisting to confess Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life."] Whatever the nature or level of persecution, the only way to oppose opposition is to meet unbelief's resistance with Gospel faith's persistence. That boils down to...

III. The Authenticity of Faith—v.18-20, *Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "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."*

- A. Authentic faith in the truth doesn't ask "Is it popular or safe?" but "Is it true and right?" (The faithful will stand up when unbelief says, "Sit down." [When Socrates was offered his freedom if he abandoned the pursuit of truth: Plato records him saying, "I shall obey God rather than you."] That was exactly Peter's answer, and it should be ours.)
- B. Satan uses intimidation to silence us, but being "filled with the Holy Spirit" sets our faith in God above the fear of man, and sets on our lips the name of Him who lives in our hearts: **Jesus, Jesus, Jesus**.
- C. Peter's answer to the Sanhedrin's resistance clearly describes what a Christian's integrity of faith should look like: "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." [Albert Camus, an atheistic existentialist made an astute observation that echoes the need for this kind of integrity: "What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out, loud and clear... in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could arise in the heart of the simplest man."] What a statement!

CONCLUSION:

—When unbelief opposes the Gospel, fear can paralyze our tongues, if we do not give our fears to God and let the Holy Spirit fill us. If we meet unbelief's resistance with Gospel faith's persistence, it offers unbelievers another opportunity to come to Jesus who told us, "This will result in your being witnesses to them... make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom..." whether we are resisted or heard, emotionally snubbed or physically beheaded, as believers with authentic faith in Christ, "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." What is it we've seen? Jesus isn't done yet!