

## Silence!

Acts 4:1-22

### Introduction

Has it ever occurred to you that the less people know about Christ, the more they seem to like Him? In a few weeks, you will be shopping in stores to the sights of manger scenes and the sounds of Christmas carols. You can buy CD's from popular singers that tell about the little baby Jesus. The baby in the manger touches even the most cynical soul. However, the moment you suggest the fact that the little baby Jesus grew up and will one day come back as sovereign King over all humanity and will judge all who have not claimed Him as Lord and King and will reward all those who have – well, that is another story.

Indeed, since Christ said the world would hate Him, we can be sure that when the world likes Him, it is because they either do not know Him, or they have made Him into something He is not. In addition, remember that Jesus Christ Himself said that just as the world hated Him, so they would hate His followers.

Perhaps you have been listening to the religious news recently and heard the story of a fourth grader. She began telling her friends, during recess, about her recent salvation. The teacher ordered her to stop, and she refused. Her parents took issue with that decision and it went through the court systems. Ultimately, her right was upheld to tell her friends about Jesus Christ.

That fourth grade girl simply had to share the good news. And in doing that, she created trouble for herself and her family.

### The Empowering of Peter by the Holy Spirit

That story is not new. In fact, soon after the ascension of Jesus Christ, trouble visited the young church in Jerusalem. Look at the book of Acts, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2.

*As they [Peter and John] were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*

Now, you need to understand a little about the Sadducees. Peter and John happen to be facing a very serious problem.

The Sadducees were an influential, wealthy group of men. The high priest was usually chosen from their ranks. They collaborated with the Roman government in any way they could, in order to keep Judaism alive and well. They also happened to dominate the Sanhedrin, which was the seventy-two member Jewish supreme court.

#### Sadducees' threefold denial

Now, the Sadducees held to a threefold denial. They denied:

1. the miraculous or supernatural;
2. the existence of unseen spirit beings or angels;
3. the resurrection from the dead.

#### Sadducees' threefold dilemma

The Sadducees obviously then, have a threefold dilemma. This includes:

1. a man had been miraculously healed;

2. it happened by an unseen spiritual dynamic;
3. the credit is being given to a resurrected Jesus whom they put to death just a few months earlier.

Their dilemma could be stated in one sentence – Peter and John had not broken any law by healing a lame man, yet the power to heal was being credited to a man the Sanhedrin thought was dead and gone. In other words, if Peter and John were right, the Sanhedrin was wrong. Furthermore, the Sanhedrin are indeed guilty of condemning to death not just any man, but their legitimate Messiah!

So, what do the Sanhedrin do now?! Look at verses 3 and 4.

***And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.***

In other words, all through the night, the city is brimming with the news of the lame beggar’s healing and the resurrected Christ who made it happen. More and more reports are coming in to the church makeshift headquarters of more and more people placing their faith in Jesus. They have been keeping a count as best they can and now, the church is five thousand *men*. Notice, that is just counting the men – five thousand of them – and if you added wives and children, the church might be, at this moment, as much as ten thousand strong!

Continue to verses 5 and 6.

***On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.***

Let us set this scene. The seventy-two member Sanhedrin is there on their raised platform, seated according to party and rank in a semi-circle. This is the same courtroom where Jesus Christ was interrogated and condemned.

Luke records, in verse 6, the names of the men with the repeated use of the Greek word “kai,” which means, “and”. That grammatical technique emphasizes each and every person. It is as if Luke sets the stage with drama, “You won’t believe who was there to interrogate Peter and John! There were the rulers and all the elders and each and every scribe elected to that august board. Then there is Annas and

Caiaphas, there like serpents hissing at the light [remember these two men played the leading role in sentencing Jesus to death] . . .”

Talk about intimidation! Peter and John were “out of their league”. There they stand before wealthy, powerful men in fine robes, who are articulate experts and seminary doctorates. And Peter and John were poorly dressed, callused, rough speaking, nobodies. They are the little guys taking on the corporate giants.

Peter and John were like the little grocer who refused to sell his small fruit and vegetable store when the city was revamping his particular block. He would not budge, so on one side of him a huge department store was built and on the other side a large multi-story complex was built that sold everything from bicycles to apples. That little grocer never saw sunlight again; he was overshadowed by the giant competitors. But with great ingenuity, he scraped together everything he could and bought a huge sign. He attached it to the top of his little store, so that shining in big neon letters, were the words, “Main Entrance Here”!

Peter and John were about to be crushed by the weight of generations of tradition and practice. If there was ever a moment when Peter and John could have gulped hard and wondered, “What did we get ourselves into?” – it would be this moment.

Let’s face it – one of our natural problems stems from the fact that we do not like to be different; we are by nature, imitators. Fashion is one indicator of that. The reason I am not wearing a necktie that is twelve inches wide and a baby blue leisure suit is because nobody else is wearing them – and I thank God for that!

If there was ever a moment when Peter and John recognized how different they were; how shocking their story was, it was now.

Continue to verses 7 and 8a.

***When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, . . .***

Stop at this point. If you misunderstand this answer as an act of Peter’s brilliance or some self-initiated bravery, you miss the significance of this last phrase. Remember, there is one baptism that we all receive on the day we are saved, but there are many

fillings. In other words, there are many times in our lives when the Spirit of God dominates our minds and hearts and tongues so that we speak with clarity and courage. The question you have to ask yourself is, "What is it in my life that demands the domination of the Holy Spirit? What have I discovered I can't do without Him?"

## **The Exaltation of Jesus Christ by Peter**

Now, in verses 8b through 12, Peter speaks,

*Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, . . .*

(Can you see Annas and Caiaphas squirming?),

*. . . whom God raised from the dead – . . .*

(Can you see the sweat forming on the foreheads of the Sadducees?),

*. . . by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone.*

(The Sanhedrin considered themselves the builders and keepers of the temple. They had discarded the corner stone from which every angle and measurement is to be related. Peter is not finished.)

*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

Verse 10 informs us that the name in which there is salvation is Jesus Christ the Nazarene. Jesus is "Yeshua," in Hebrew, or Savior.

### **Peter's twofold declaration**

Peter makes a twofold declaration.

#### **Since Jesus Christ is the only Savior, then to follow anyone else is to remain lost**

1. First, Peter declared that since Jesus Christ is the only Savior, then to follow anyone else is to remain lost.

Notice verse 12a again.

*And there is salvation in no one else . . .*

Jesus Christ is not one god among many, He is the only God. He is not one path to heaven among many, He is the only path.

#### **Since Jesus Christ is the only truth, then to believe any other message is to remain deceived**

2. Secondly, Peter declared that since Jesus Christ is the only truth, then to believe any other message is to remain deceived.

Notice verse 12b again.

*. . . for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

Jesus Christ is not one source of divine truth, He is the only source.

You need to understand that the strategy of Satan in our culture is not necessarily to deny that Jesus Christ is the way to heaven, but to deny that He is the only way. So today, the God of the Bible is only one god among many gods, each equally valid in their claims.

In the 1993-1994 Barna research report, in fact, nearly two out of three adults contend that the choice of one religious faith over another is irrelevant because all religions teach the same basic lessons about life.

So, in our day, you have probably heard statements such as:

- "I love Christ as much as you do, but I don't think He is the only way to God. God would never limit the way to heaven to one person."
- "Religious truth is just a matter of your own personal interpretation."
- "I think that all the religions of the world are essentially the same."
- "There are a lot of things I like about Christianity, except the fact that it seems so dogmatic and intolerant of other religions."

Erwin Lutzer's book entitled, *Christ Among Other God's*, caught my attention. Dr. Lutzer described his exposure to the Parliament of World Religions, which met in Chicago last year. In attendance were six thousand delegates with one message, "Unite or perish!" which was a call for all

the religions of the world to find common ground and unite (tribulation!).

Lutzer reported that the Parliament on World Religions held seminars to help people get over the thought that one religion could be superior to another. In fact, that is “the crucial obstacle” to religious unity.

Lutzer made an interesting observation that among the seven hundred workshops offered, Christ was variously admired, quoted, and favorably compared to other religious teachers. However, He was merely one enlightened man among many. Though He was respected, He was not worshiped.

Lutzer concluded that today, whether we like it or not, popular opinion sounds like this,

*The doctrines of different faiths should not be held as truth, but as shells that contain kernels of truth that are found in all religions. It is best to speak of religious tradition rather than religious truth.*

Today, the society God has called us to reach is actually moving from pluralism, to syncretism. That means that you do not have to even buy totally into one particular religion – you can now choose. You can choose a little bit from Christianity, a little bit from new ageism, a little bit from Hinduism, a little bit from Protestant doctrine, a little bit from Catholic doctrine and mix them all together and come up with your own personal religion that fits your lifestyle and your own little god who accepts you on your terms. Spirituality is one happy buffet of possibilities.

Peter’s words in Acts, chapter 4, verse 12, shatter any attempt to pick and choose. Jesus Christ is the only name; He is the only way of salvation – period!

The Sanhedrin got the message. It was not Jesus and Judaism, it was Jesus instead of Judaism.

Notice verses 13 through 17.

***Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, . . .***

(The first word used to describe Peter and John, is “uneducated,” which, when literally translated means, “unable to write”. The second word used to describe them is “untrained,” which is the Greek word that gives us the transliterated word for “idiot”.)

***. . . and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they***

***had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.”***

Do you get the idea that this courtroom has no interest in discovering the truth, but rather has the desire to suppress the truth?!

So, after their brief recess, the Sanhedrin re-gathered. The gavel came down and the court ordered these two fishermen, “*Silence!* We order you to never speak His name again.”

In other words, “We don’t want to argue about it; we don’t want to weigh the evidence! We just want you to be quiet about it. Don’t say anything to anyone!”

## **Application**

May I ask you a question? Who represents your Sanhedrin today? Who is it that tries to intimidate you into silence? Are you silent in that corporate setting; that campus filled with liberal thought and relative values; that athletic club; that neighborhood gang? Where is it that you feel that untrained, ill-equipped, better not say anything lest they think I’m a lunatic feeling? Where are your “Sanhedrins,” and what does it take for you to stand, like Peter and John, and testify to the truth about Christ?

### **Four convictions to stand up to society’s “Sanhedrins”**

In order to stand like Peter and John, you will need to have the same four convictions. Let me give them to you.

#### **The conviction that Jesus Christ has come back to life**

1. First, you will need to have the conviction that Jesus Christ has come back to life.

Peter and John were convinced that Jesus Christ was alive. Do you believe that?

### **The conviction that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life**

2. Secondly, you will need to have the conviction that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life.

Peter and John were convinced that Jesus Christ was the only hope for salvation! Have you arrived at that conviction?

The state of our culture wherein we are called to testify, could be illustrated by someone who is drowning at sea and has a life-saving rope thrown at them. They respond by insisting that they deserve a choice of several ropes, along with the option of swimming to safety if they so choose.

Can you speak with conviction that a person either cling to the saving work of Christ alone or they will never make it to heaven's shore? Are you convinced that a person must trust Christ alone or perish?!

### **The conviction that salvation through Jesus Christ is the most important decision in life**

3. Thirdly, you will need to have the conviction that salvation through Jesus Christ is the most important decision in life.

Have you made that decision?

### **The conviction that obedience to Jesus Christ is the only lifestyle worth living**

4. Fourthly, you will need to have the conviction that obedience to Jesus Christ is the only lifestyle worth living.

The apostles Peter and John knew that they could be, as Jesus had been, condemned to die. They had no reason to hope for anything better than a cross for themselves. But if you ever hope to make a difference in your culture, His name must mean more to you than your own life.

When I was in France, recently, I had dinner with a veteran missionary couple who had spent forty years serving the Lord. Their apartment was not much larger than most of your living rooms. Mr. Hazeltine and his dear wife retired simply because of ill health. They decided to remain in France rather than return to the United States. I asked him to recount his ministry for me – a ministry that actually began in Albania.

With great humility he told me and the other dinner guests, many stories of God's power and protection. While serving in Albania for several years, before being forced out by communists years ago, he was taken by the police and interrogated about his religion and the work he had been involved in. The police commander then demanded that he give them the names of all the Albanian Christians. Knowing that if he did so, he would literally be sending them to their death, Mr. Hazeltine refused. The commander pulled out his pistol and put it to Mr. Hazeltine's head and said, "If you do not tell me, I will kill you now."

He responded by saying, "I will not give you their names, and if you kill me, I will go straight to heaven."

After a moment or two, for some unexplainable reason, the commander lowered his pistol and Mr. Hazeltine walked out unharmed.

Now look at verses 18 through 22 of Acts, chapter 4.

*And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak . . .*

(literally, not to make a sound!),

*. . . or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*

(The Sanhedrin is attempting to nullify the command of Jesus – He told them to be witnesses and they are telling Peter and John to be silent.)

*But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.*

False religion, as impressive and wealthy and powerful and magnificent as it may look and sound, is a facade of spirituality that cannot stand even the slightest exposure to truth. It is helpless before the simple testimony of a transformed life.

Before we leave the story of the lame beggar's remarkable transformation, let me rehearse the story once more, from a different point of view.

When Jesus Christ was born in human flesh, this beggar was seven years old. Hopelessly crippled, he sat alone as the other Jewish children played in the streets of Jerusalem. How his mother and father must have agonized over the sight of their little boy who was so weak. This little boy was unable to attend school, unable to help at home, unable to go anywhere unless someone carried him.

Religion was of no help. The rabbis would speculate that there was sin in the lives of the parents that had caused God to bring pain into their lives.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem as a twelve year old boy, this man, now nineteen or twenty years old, would have already begun his life of begging. As young Jesus confounded the wise leaders in the temple, this young man begged for alms a dozen yards away.

Nearly twenty years would go by when suddenly, Jesus entered Jerusalem amidst the “Hosannas” of the crowd. As Jesus traveled about the city and taught in the temple, I have no doubt that at least a time or two, He entered through that Beautiful gate where the beggar sat. Did their eyes ever meet? Did Jesus ever stop to talk with him? The troubling truth was, though He healed others, He never stopped and healed him.

Now, the miracle man was gone. There was no hope now; no prospect beyond begging. Perhaps his

brothers or his father simply carried him to his daily post just outside the gate.

Then Peter and John came. Perhaps he recognized them and asked them for some money. Yet, in a moment of time, through the power of that crucified, resurrected Man, the Messiah, he was healed; he could walk.

And now, before the supreme court, the very court that sentenced the Messiah to death, this man stands. He was unnamed and unimpressive, except for one thing – the same thing that sets you and me apart; the same thing that refutes the claims of our own “Sanhedrins”. That is – we were once blind, but now we see; we were once lost, hopeless, crippled with guilt, empty, but now we are forgiven, saved, spiritually made whole.

Now he stands with Peter and John in that courtroom, as we should stand in ours, unwilling and unable to be silenced. Why? Because we have the answer; we know the truth. The truth is,

*. . . there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*

*. . . and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21b)*

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