

## Unit 4, Lesson 26: Jailed for Jesus

Memory Verse: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.” (Acts 4:19)

The book of Acts recounts a few key stories about the earliest followers of Jesus. It does not provide a running membership count or a list of “congregations.” We do know that the last verse of chapter two tells us that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)

We also don't know how long it was between Pentecost and the next story recounted. Luke just tells us, “One day....” Peter and John were on their way to the temple and they came across a beggar. He was crippled from birth, disabled and unable to work. So he lived off the generosity of people coming to the temple to worship. He saw Peter and John coming and asked them for a gift. He got way more than he had expected!

“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” These were Peter's words in answer to the beggar's plea. And then he reached down, grabbed the beggar's hand, and helped him stand.

One gets the idea this wasn't a planned event. Instead, Peter saw this man and his need and had compassion on him; a compassion he had learned in over three years of watching Jesus. Prompted by the Holy Spirit he offered healing, a permanent solution to a problem the man had been satisfied to seek temporary solutions to all his life before this day (over 40 years per Acts 4:22).

Certainly if Peter and John had thought this out ahead of time they could have predicted the resulting furor. This might have discouraged them from doing what they did. All the people marveled at what had happened and a crowd gathered. A typical preacher, Peter couldn't let a good crowd go to waste, so he began to preach.

“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

“Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.” (Acts 3:13-20)

Notice again that Peter gives his crowd an “out” over the death of Jesus. “You acted in ignorance,” he excuses. But Peter hadn't finished preaching when trouble arrived in the form of temple guards and a group of Sadducees. These were the opponents of the Pharisees in Judaism, but in their strict adherence to only the written Torah they didn't believe in a resurrection from death. Peter and John were preaching that Jesus had risen, so they were preaching resurrection. The Sadducees wanted them to stop.

It was late when they got there, so they put Peter and John in prison overnight. The next day all the top people of the Jewish religion, the high priest (Annas rather than Caiaphas now) and many of his close associates among them. They brought Peter and John in and began to question them. Another crowd, another chance for Peter to preach!

“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 everyone else in 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 completely 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.” (Acts 4:8-12)

We know the Spirit must have really empowered Peter, for only a few months (or less) earlier he had denied he knew Jesus to avoid getting into trouble. Now he's almost deliberately stirring up trouble by telling the leading Jewish leaders they were responsible for Jesus' death. And unlike his speeches to the general public, Peter makes little room for his audience to escape responsibility.

And to really make himself disliked, he tells these religious leaders that salvation isn't from them, it's from the man Peter and his companions are preaching. “You can't offer salvation to the people,” he tells them. “Only Jesus can do that.” He's essentially telling them they have no purpose, that their work is meaningless, that they are a waste of social resources. No wonder they were mad!

But with all the people astounded by the miracle of the day before these priests and teachers couldn't get away with punishing Peter and John, so they told them to stop preaching. That's when Peter repeated the words of this lesson's memory verse. “You tell us one thing, God tells us another. What do you think we should do?”

After further threats the Jews let Peter and John go. They went back to the believers and told what had happened. You can read their prayer in Acts 4:24-30. At the end of the prayer the place where they were meeting was shaken, and again the Holy Spirit came on the people with power. So they went out and spoke the word of God and the message of Jesus even more boldly.

Possible thought papers:

1. Some people misunderstand the meaning of Acts 4:12 and think the name “Jesus” is some sort of “magic” word. Recall that in the Bible name represents character. How does the meaning of this verse change if we substitute “character” for “name”?
2. Scan through the rest of Acts to see how many times John is mentioned. What responsibility did he have that might have prevented him from risking further imprisonment?
3. Today the Holy Spirit rarely works through healing miracles like the one Peter and John performed for the cripple. Why do you think that is? How is that helpful when we try to work for God? How is that a hindrance when we try to work for God?