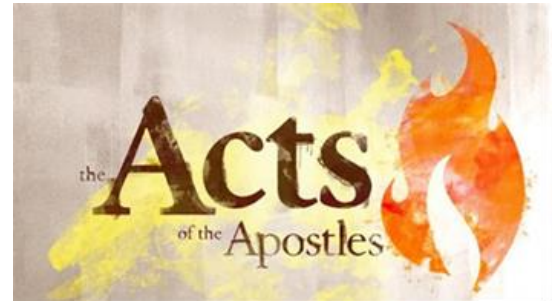


ACTS: THE STORY OF THE CHURCH – Part 5

MAKING THE SADDUCEES MAD

Acts 4:1-22

Previously we saw Peter and John in proximity to the Temple where they were asked for alms from the crippled man who had begged there for decades. His spot would have been lucrative as Jews coming to the Temple for daily and weekly observances would be in a giving spirit (for both right and wrong reasons). He was most likely doing well asking for alms.



When he asked Peter and John, he received a reply like no other: “I do not have money, but I’ll give you this: By the power of the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk!” And he did. As strength flowed up from his feet and ankles he began to walk and dance around (leapt for joy), you know, the things anyone would do if they had been healed after forty years of being crippled.

He went into the Temple still leaping and shouting praises for Jesus the Messiah, which is where today’s lesson takes off.

Those in the Temple recognized who the man was and were in obvious shock. I am guessing the man was as well. This would have been his first time inside the Temple. He was impure and as a result had been excluded from the community of faith. Judaism precluded the lame, crippled and sick due to their inherent impurity. Jesus, quite the non-normal Jewish Rabbi, flipped that interpretation of the law around and went out of his way to include the infirmed and sinful (like the Samaritan woman at the well).

Peter and John Arrested

4¹⁻² The teaching and preaching of Peter and John angered the priests, the captain of the Temple police, and representatives of the Jewish sect of the Sadducees. They were furious that the

people were being taught that in Jesus there is a resurrection from the dead. So, while Peter and John were still speaking, the Jewish authorities came to the temple courts to oppose them. ³ They had them arrested, and since it was already evening they kept them in custody until the next day. ⁴ Yet there were many in the crowd who believed the message, bringing the total number of men who believed to nearly five thousand!

While Peter and John were still in the Temple with the healed man the “management” of the Temple came storming in, demanding to know why they were teaching heresy. What heresy we might ask? That Jesus rose from the dead. The Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees (clergy) and Sadducees (laity), of which the Sadducees were the largest group. It is also true that the Sadducees held the most unique theological stances in Judaism, like no resurrection of the dead ever (so no Day of the Lord) and they did not believe in angels.

Because they could have them arrested, they did have them arrested. Being whisked off to jail late in the afternoon led to them staying there overnight. As this was playing out many more people were coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah.

⁵ The next day many Jewish leaders, religious scholars, and elders of the people convened a meeting in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others who were members of the high priest’s family. ⁷ They made Peter and John stand in front of the council as they questioned them, saying, “Tell us, by what power and authority have you done these things?”

⁸ Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered, “Respected elders and leaders of the people, listen. ⁹ Are we being put on trial today for doing an act of kindness by healing a frail, crippled man? Well then, ¹⁰ you and everyone else in Israel should know that it is by the power of the name of Jesus that the crippled man stands here today completely healed! You crucified Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but God raised him from the dead. ¹¹ This Jesus is ‘the stone that you, the builders, have rejected, and now he has become the cornerstone!’ ¹² There is no one else who has the power to save us, for there is only one name to whom God has

given authority by which we must experience salvation: the name of Jesus.”

¹³ The council members were astonished as they witnessed the bold courage of Peter and John, especially when they discovered that they were just ordinary men who had never had religious training. Then they began to understand the effect Jesus had on them simply by spending time with him. ¹⁴ Standing there with them was the healed man, and there was nothing further they could say.

¹⁵ So they ordered them to leave the room while they discussed the matter. Among themselves, they said, ¹⁶ “What should we do with these men? Everyone in Jerusalem can clearly see that they have performed a notable sign and wonder—we cannot deny that. ¹⁷ But to keep this propaganda from spreading any further among the people, let us threaten them severely and warn them to never speak to anyone in this name again.”

¹⁸ So they had them brought back in before the council, and they commanded them to never teach the people or speak again using the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, “You can judge for yourselves—is it better to listen to you or to God? ²⁰ It’s impossible for us to stop speaking about all the things we’ve seen and heard!”

²¹ Since the members of the council could not come up with a crime they could punish them for, they threatened them once more and let them go. All the people praised God, thrilled over the miraculous healing of the crippled man. ²² And the man who received this miracle sign of healing was over forty years old.

At this point the Sadducees were wealthy and powerful as were the majority of the Sanhedrin. They were not the theological leaders of Judaism; they were the practical leaders via money and position. If you cite their theology it would be arch-conservative. Healing was one thing, resurrecting from the dead was another, which made Peter and John heretics who were being treasonous to Judaism.

The next morning the pair were released from jail and ordered to stand before the Sanhedrin/High Council and answer the question, “By what power and authority have you done these things?”

Peter, spiritually strong by/through the Holy Spirit, preached a similar sermon to his two previous ones telling the Jesus story and indicting the Jewish high leadership of crucifying the Messiah. He cites Jesus as the cornerstone of God’s Kingdom and the only name through which salvation can be attained.

The religious leaders were astonished by the “bold Courage” of Peter and John who they had described as “simple, ordinary” men. This means they were not seminary graduates; they were fishermen. Of course, it helped that the formerly crippled man was standing there as well. Hard to argue with the actual, physical proof of a miracle.

They asked Peter and John to leave so they could discuss what to do with them. As they talked through everything it became clear that they did not have anything to charge them with and, they noted it was widely known they had healed the crippled man. They had performed a “notable sign and wonder.” So, they decided to bring them back in for a stern warning about never preaching about Jesus again. They called it propaganda. “But to keep this propaganda from spreading any further among the people, let’s threaten them severely and warn them to never speak to anyone in this name again” (5:17).

Good luck with that.

Upon being told to go away and be quiet Peter said, “You can judge for yourselves-is it better to listen to you or to God? It is impossible for us to stop speaking about all the things we have seen and heard.

So off they went to continue preaching the Gospel.

Takeaways:

1. God heals. It may not as prevalent as it was in the beginning when demonstrative healings proved the reality of Jesus and of the movement, but healing can still occur.
2. We must be bold in our faith. We do not face persecution in the manner or to the degree that the early church did, or as people on the other side of the world do today. In fact, we have it very easy. But we still must be bold in our witness in how we live and how we speak and how we share the Gospel.

Amen and Amen.

Dr. Michael McCullar
Formations Pastor
Johns Creek Baptist Church