

The Boldness of Peter
Acts 4 1-31

John 10:1-18
Matthew 28:11-20
Responsive Psalm 125

Turn with me to Acts chapter 4, as we read through our text this morning we will see the consequence of the healing of the lame man outside the temple which we read about last week. A little spoiler before we read....the consequence of that miracle, brings about an opportunity for Peter and John to share the gospel with the high priest. So let us read this account this morning through verse 31. (Read Acts 4:1-31)

I can only imagine the outrage of these priests and the sadducees who ceased them and put them into prison. Many of them believing that since now that Jesus was dead that things would be able to just back to the way they were, no more pesky Jesus and his followers leading people away from their authority. As we can see throughout all the gospel accounts that the religious leaders despised Jesus and even from earlier on were seeking to have him killed,so it really is no surprise that they would be extremely angry when hearing now his disciples whom they likely believed scattered and went into hiding now standing in the temple and preaching that the very one that they put to death was in fact the promised Messiah.

I mean, Peter back in chapter 2 accused them of killing the Messiah, he said, “Men of Israel hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves also know- him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death. And again in verse 36 “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.” So Peter put these priests in a tough spot basically, they either need to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah, and repent for what they have done, and face the reality that the very Messiah they were looking for they had put to death, or they can continue to deny it and seek to silence all those who question their authority. As we see in verse 37 of chapter 2, many were convicted for it says, Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

But as we see this morning there were others who were not convicted, but rather were angered. And really what we are seeing here in his account, is nothing more then the effect of the gospel itself. As Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians, “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.” We see that at play here, to some they are convicted and cut to the heart and cry out, what must we do!, and to others it only stirs up in them anger, and hatred as they seek to silence those who are the aroma of Christ. Jesus warned of this very thing when he told his disciples, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of this world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. IF they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also.”

We have been talking a lot the last few weeks about the works of the Holy Spirit in the spreading of the gospel, and how the holy spirit works in the heart to prepare for the word to be heard. For without the Holy Spirit's work in the new birth, one can not see the kingdom of God as Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he can not see the kingdom of God. We are seeing this very thing play out here in these early chapters of this book. Peter and the apostles began to preach Christ crucified, and resurrected and in that first day, it says 3000 men were added, and here at the end of the account of healing the lame man outside the temple it says that now there was 5000 who were confessing Christ. The holy spirit was working in revealing the truths of God to the people....but those who worked at the temple, the priests, the Sadducee and the chief guard were unable to see it and instead reacted in anger and seized Peter and John while they were yet speaking!

We can see God's sovereign hand working through all of this, as we all know, "God has mercy on whomever he wills, and whomever he wills he hardens." We are seeing it happen here, these priests, and others who held station at the temple are not just in disagreement with what Peter and John were saying, but their hearts were hardened, they are not able to hear it for it was not given to them to hear.

But now look what happens, what these leaders meant for ill, God intend for something else. For upon their arrest they then are sent to testify to the high priest and elders. The gospel is now being shared throughout all of Jerusalem, from the least of them to the greatest of them. And again, we see Peter here, the one who out of fear denied Christ on the night of his arrest, is now standing in front of the high priest and the sanhedrin, the religious leaders in Jerusalem, and now boldly giving an account and sharing the gospel to them as well. The difference between Peter here, and the Peter we see throughout the gospels is answered here in verse 8, for it says, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit." It was the Holy Spirit who gave him boldness, it was the Holy Spirit who gave him the words to speak, and it was God who had allowed them to be put into that situation. Christ even warned them that this would happen as well, he said, "now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say. And we see that, verse 13 says, "when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. Peter being filled with the spirit responds to them. Having been given great boldness and words to speak the gospel to the very men who plotted against Jesus.

In this account we are witnessing the great biblical mystery? That even the will of man is subject to the will of God, and that mankind by doing exactly what they desire and set out to do, by a decision they make is the very decision that God uses for his purpose. Yes, even the arrest of Peter and John, which put them exactly where God wanted them, giving them an opportunity to stand before the leaders of Israel and proclaim the risen Lord to them. And even the miracle performed, the healing of this lame man served to actually become their protection against sever punishment or even death. Verse 14, "seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it., verse 16, What shall we do to these men? For indeed that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem and we cannot deny it."

God had shown his power through Peter for the ministry of the gospel, and for the protection of the apostles. The high priest, and the leaders hands were tied....the miracle was too obvious, even they could not deny it. Yet seeing it, they still refused to believe. Just like the multitudes who saw Jesus, who heard his teaching and witnessed the miracles...when we see his followers after his death there does not seem to be very many, only a select few. For it takes more than seeing to believe, for belief in Christ is only discerned by the spirit, and it is only granted to those who it has been given.

So many people look at the doctrines of Grace as teaching that we are all just robots, programmed with no autonomy....but we know that isn't true, I think this idea largely comes out of the simple fact that we simply can not reconcile or fully understand God's sovereign power, we being finite creatures are not able to fully understand the infinite God, we can't reconcile how both of these realities can be true. That God is sovereign over all things, and that all things are subject to his will, yet we go about our lives making our own decisions and choices, but even those choices we freely make are subject to his will. The only conclusion is that God is much bigger than we can even imagine, he is more powerful than we can comprehend, and the reality is all that we can do is have faith and take him at his word which is why to see the kingdom of God, one must first be born again, become a new creature in Christ, with new eyes, and new ears making us able to see the kingdom, and hear his word and being made able to believe.

This really is the heart of the issue, It is the reality that Christianity is something that is spiritually discerned. IF we were to look at all the different denominations, all of the different beliefs that would fall under the umbrella of believing in God we can basically break them up into 2 very different camps. There is the camp of those who believe it is a form of justification by works, they seek to do good works hoping to gain enough merit to be worthy of God's mercy in the end. Or they believe by their own autonomy that they chose God, that God is sitting by just waiting for sovereign man to make up it's mind. Then there is the camp of those who believe that the work of salvation and justification is by God alone. That is man can not gain enough merit by works, nor does man have the power in his natural sinful state to truly chose God. Another way to put it, salvation is either synergistic, meaning...God and man working together, or its monogistic, meaning, by God alone....it seems that this chapter comes up quite often, but again if we look at Matthew...which of these camps do you think God is talking to? Matthew 7, verse 21. "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven....there will be those who will spend their entire life claiming Christ, believing themselves to be Christians....but it was not born of the spirit, as we see in verse 22 they were trying to work their way in.

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, depart from me you who practice lawlessness." One can not work up enough merit to be justified before this holy God, that is why he sent his son, that is why Christ had to die to pay that penalty for us, for we are unable to gain any merit before God so we must have it applied to us from God himself. And that right there is the gospel...no man is worthy, no man able to be righteous...the entire bible teaches us that..Jesus called the religious leaders in Jerusalem hypocrites, why? Because they sought to build up their own righteousness, they believed they were good enough to gain merit before God...yet as we see, their heart is darkened, they are full of anger, jealousy and wrath against God's people. They were so focused upon the physical aspect of being holy, they completely missed the fact that It really was all to do with the heart, it really was spiritual all along. Good works will not create a clean heart, but a clean heart will produce good works. That is the whole point of the book of James.

For anyone who may listen to this message today, and take offense or disagree with what I have been saying about the sovereignty of God, and that belief only comes by God, through the holy spirit who enables us to believe...if it was not for his enabling, we would not believe... then I challenge you to look at the prayer of these men after having been released from the religious court of the high priest and elders, verse 27 “For truly against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together.....now look at what they said, “to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done” This is not a God who is subject to man's will, but rather this is a God who works out his will within the hearts and minds of mankind. What the gentiles, the Israels, Herod and Pilot did.... in crucifying Christ, was Gods purpose that he determined before hand.

That means, this was so set in stone, that there was no way it was not going to happen..thats right, the decisions of these people, their actions were determined to produce the outcome of God's will. Who are we, oh man, being that which is created to cry out to the creator that this is unfair. If it was not for God's sovereign hand, and the determined will of God to accomplish his plan, we would all still be lost in our sins having no hope, no redemption. Praise God for his sovereign hand, to accomplish all that he sets out and determines to accomplish. That there is nothing that will thwart his purpose, there is nothing that can sway him from what he determines. And look how they continue to pray, knowing that they are praying to this sovereign God, who is in control of all things, who is no subject to the wills and desires of man, but yes, is indeed even in control of them. Verse 29, “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and gratn to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word, by stretching out your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

They recognize that it was God who delivered them from the judgment that these priests and Sadducee who arrested them and were seeking to punish them. They are not praying to a God who is unable to effect man's will, but they are praying to the God who works all things for his purpose and glory. This sorta sets up a challenge for us, do we pray with such fervor? Do we pray with such passion, believing that God is not only able, but is willing to answer our prayers? And like wise do we recognize and praise God when he does answer our prayers? Peter and John were just threatened by the High Priest to not be talking about Jesus and the ressurection, it says...they were severely threatened, yet in their prayer they bring it to God, trusting in his deliverance and protection....and look at what they pray for, it is not so much for protection against persecution for themselves, but rather it is for having boldness to proclaim the word despite the persecution. Understanding that persecution will likely come, for it is a part of standing with Christ, as he said, “they hated me, they will also hate you.” But that is not their concern...they pray that they may be ever bold in sharing the gospel, and they pray that God will be pleased to use them effectively in his ministry.

So to sum up this passage this morning there are a few take away points I want to leave you with this morning. First, that God is sovereign in all things. In an attempt to silence him and his followers having put him to death by the plotting and scheming of their own will and desire, they could only put into effect the very plan and will of God to bring salvation to the world through his Son. What they meant for evil, God worked for good.

Second, the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry. We see Peter, who before the spirit, argued with Jesus, ran in fear seeking his own preservation, and now we see this same man, standing and proclaiming that this Jesus whom they killed, was indeed the son of God sent to purchase our redemption. Peter, and the other disciples now understand, the Holy Spirit has revealed it to them. . And likewise those who are listening, those who are hearing the gospel have been given the ability to believe.

Third, To be bold for the sake of the gospel, not being concerned of what to say for the Holy Spirit will give us the words. It is not our job to convince people to change their minds for Christ by the eloquence of our arguments, it is merely our job to proclaim him.

And lastly, to go to God in prayer for all things believing that he is willing and able to answer it. Believing that even in our own prayers God has a purpose, and let us rest upon that, let us put our hope in him and rest upon him for all things, and trust that no matter the outcomes, or what happens, believe that it is God who is working out his will, and ultimately it is for our good.