

Roy's Sermon for 29/11/2020

Acts 4:12-22 'A Cripple Set Part 6: These Men Have Been With Jesus!'

Last time we looked at verses 1-12 of Acts chapter 4: 'A Cripple Set Free part 5: Beware Of Religion'. I made the statement that more damage has been done to Christianity and the cause of Christ from within those who claim His Name than from the whole world of enmity and evil from outside of God's church. This is what we found from those Sadducees, Pharisees, Priests and Rulers of God's people. Verse 2: "they were greatly disturbed because Peter and John were teaching the people and in Jesus proclaiming the resurrection", and I explained that 'religion', can so blind us that we fail to see the Hand of God even when we see the evidence of that hand before our very eyes! Yes a miracle has occurred and yet they are "greatly disturbed" so that in verse 3 they throw Peter and John in gaol. But in verse 4 2000 men are saved! And as I said, it wasn't the miracle which convicted the men, it was the message which was preached in Jesus' Name!

In verses 5 and 6 they hold a council of war meeting. In verse 7 Peter and John are hauled before the court and are asked "by what power and what name did you do this?" Yet the question wasn't genuine because they knew exactly in whose Name the men spoke. Verse 8: "filled with", or emboldened by "the Holy Spirit" Peter lets them have it: "If we are being called to account for an act of kindness done to a cripple, 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". Yes, Peter, this nobody, lays the blame for Jesus' death down at the feet of his hearers, while at the same time declaring that Jesus lives!

Then he quotes scripture at them: Psalm 118 v22 "that Jesus is the capstone that you builders rejected". Yes false religion can blind us to the truth about God, because in the form of religion, Satan can come to us as "an Angel of light". But we see in v12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved".

And so the account continues! A Cripple Set Free Part 6: Acts 4:12-22 'These Men Have Been With Jesus!' So again, Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved." Well can you imagine? This nobody, this commoner, this ignorant fisherman would teach, would even preach to these religious authorities? Remember, these were the Religious elite. This council of the 70 strong ruling and teaching elders of Jewish society: the Sanhedrin. People didn't school them in the things of the Old Testament scriptures, others came to them to make rulings over Jewish society and particularly upon the things of the scriptures!

Yet here were these prisoners, yes these ignorant nobodys, and they would seek to lecture those upper class men of elite standing in the things of God? And we need also to remember what Peter has just done. He has interpreted Psalm 118:22 "the stone that you builders rejected has become the capstone". He meant that the power and authority which they killed and denied, has become that which upon the whole Kingdom of God stands, lives and breathes. Yes He is the head of all things! And then he rams it home by saying indeed "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved." You killed the very Son of God, not just some man. Yes Jesus is Lord! What will you say to Him when you see Him face to face? You will be forced to confess His Lordship over all things. Indeed, over your own lives and eternal souls. Yes eternal life with God, (that if you believe in such things which I know that some of you don't), yes eternal life with God, or an eternity apart from Him in hell, rests solely up on the shoulders of "Jesus

Christ of Nazareth, there is no other name." No there has been no other name, nor will there ever be any other name through which men may come to God!

Friends, I touched upon this last time. When false religion is confronted with God's truth about Jesus, it is threatened and often responds with violence. Yes, first it is silenced, but then it often responds with violence. Which is what we see here before us. Verse 13 "when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled ordinary men, they took note that these men had been with Jesus."

Friends, as the Bible commentator Marcus Loane explains, the power and impact of this statement, cannot be overstated. It would be like standing before the murderous powers that be during the days of the Reformation, when the reformers broke away from the tyranny of Rome, and declaring openly that the Pope is the son of Satan and he is going to burn in hell. Every word that they uttered, (while being those bullets from a sniper's rifle aimed squarely at the council members), yes each of those words would also have been, even as nails into their own coffins!

You know, when I read these things brothers and sisters, it really puts me to shame. I really want to be that person. Yes I want to be that person who boldly and unashamedly speaks out in Jesus' Name all the time. With no regard for self-preservation or how I look in the sight of others. Yes I want with wisdom to speak with that boldness of which we read before us. Again, with no thoughts of self-preservation. Only the declaration of who Jesus is and what He has done for me and all of His people! And you know, speaking and testifying in Jesus' Name is like a muscle which needs to be trained. It's like listening to sermons without wandering or falling asleep. It's a discipline which needs to be learned.

These are not things which come to us naturally. No they are not a naturally occurring part of our make up. And actually, the opposite is true. We would rather not say a word and just simply blend in with the scenery. Yes our natural inclination is to be ashamed of Christ and His gospel and remain silent. But do you see? We need to be praying and asking God to not only give us His Providence to speak, but also, the wisdom to know when to speak, what to say, and the boldness with which to say those things. Because we can be bold but we can also be humble in our presentation of His message. Yet there are indeed times when we need to be bold and forthright as we speak. Holding nothing back, and leaving the consequences in God's Hands.

Which is what we see here before us with Peter and John before the Jewish ruling council! And where it says that they were "unschooled ordinary men" it literally means that they were ignorant commoners, as I mentioned earlier. Their manner of speech and their accent testified against them. Do you remember Peter's final denial of Jesus? Matthew 26:73: "when Peter had denied the Lord for the third time after a little while, those standing went up to Peter and said, surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away." But this did not bother Peter and John before the council though. Peter's denials of Jesus were long gone.

Jesus does not hold our past against us brothers and sisters. Yes Peter's denials of Jesus were long gone. And the Spirit of God had placed a fire in his heart and brimstone upon his tongue! He may have been from the wrong side of the tracks and from the wrong part of town, but now he walked upon, The Way. Yes The Way of Jesus! And he only does the business of the King! And no matter who he stands before, (by the Spirit of God), Peter would declare His Kingdom come. (Whether that be to a cripple in the dust or a council full of men dressed in fine clothes with the power of life and death in their hands)

Brothers and sisters, we need to pray that this is who we would be. Fearing not “those who can kill the body but after the body is dead, can throw both the soul and the body into hell” (Matt. 10:28)

Brothers and sisters, what Luke writes next in the rest of this verse is intriguing. “They were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus.” But what was it about these two men which so “astonished”, which so troubled these religious ruling elite? Without doubt Peter's condemnation of them as those who had crucified God's promised Christ, was troubling to them. The accusation that they were indeed, (in fulfillment to what was prophesied) “the builders who rejected the stone which has become the capstone” this too was troubling. And the fact that these were common ignorant men with very little education who spoke with the accent of those who came from the wrong side of the tracks, (even Nazareth), and yet could speak in such a manner and with such a conviction and boldness in the face of such odds, and with so much at stake, (even their own life and death), was also troubling. And yet these things are not what seems to have troubled these high and mighty men.

Yes it seems to have been something else which must have “astonished,” which must have troubled them. Did you notice what it was? Yes did you notice what it was which caused Luke to make such a point? The 70 religious governing elite were troubled. They were “astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus”. Can you see? This is the thing which so troubled these Religious ones with all of the authority. They had Jesus crucified, dead and buried. Believing that they had put an end to this problem of the people being loosened from the bondage of their grasp. And yet in these men who stood before them, Jesus and His Spirit lived!

But again Beloved, what was it about Peter and John, (apart from their words), which spoke so boldly and clearly of Jesus? And I guess another question for each of us to ask ourselves is; Do I have those same marks? Friends, sermons are not meant to be intellectual exercises they are personal instructions from God, as He applies His Spirit to our soul and life! When people meet us, or see us, or come to notice us, is the impression which they take away, yes is the “note which they take” away of us one of a perception that we too have “been with Jesus”? Now not that we are perfect by any means, but are we so markedly different from the world that those who don't know we are Christian ask themselves; What is it about that person? What is about them which seems so different? Well perhaps it's character. Sincerity of faith. Conviction of an eternal hope. A steadfastness in the clinging to God's truth. And the declaration of the same in the face of all comers whether that be beggar or banker, poor man or Prince.

What was it about these men? Well some commentators say that there is no definitive answer. But Matthew Henry explains that it is simply that they spoke as they did and they lived as they did, because “they had been with Jesus”. Yes that's the simple answer! Christ was seen through these men. Those religious poo-bas had no other explanation for what confronted them in the form of these two men other than this: “they had been with Jesus”! Yes all of the attributes which the two men possessed with present because “they had been with Jesus.”

Now brothers and sisters, we are not apostles but we are disciples. The word disciple comes from the same root word from which discipline also comes. A soldier lives within the disciplines of the military. A gymnast competes within the disciplines of gymnastics, whether that be the vault, the beam, the floor etc, and a Christian seeks to live within the disciplines of Christ. So those things which marked our Lord's way while He was here on earth: Integrity, wisdom, humility, compassion, kindness, obedience “even unto death on a cross”, Just to mention a few. These things should also be attributes which adorn our lives brothers and sisters. But these things will only occur if we do indeed, “spend time with Jesus”, yes spend time in His presence.

Now of course we don't have Him here present with us physically today, and yet He is present. Matthew 28:20: "and lo I am with you always to the very end of the age". And He has placed His Spirit within us as the deposit of His guarantee of those things which are to come. And we can be in His presence. "When two or three together there am I in their midst" He said. So if we truly want to be where Jesus is, we meet with His people. If we want to be where Jesus is, we will meet with Him in His Word. And if we want to be where Jesus is, we meet with Him in prayer!

Beloved, we read in Exodus that when Moses came down from Mount Sinai after his meetings with God, his face was shining or was radiant. So much so that the people were afraid. So he ended up covering his face until that glowing subsided. But do you see, it was a very visible, even tangible evidence that he had been in the presence of God. It was God's glory reflected in Moses' face. Well so too Jesus' Glory can be reflected in our lives! But friends, (similarly as with Moses, as that evidence of his meetings with God faded, as he was away from God's presence), for the glory of Jesus to shine in and through our lives, we too must keep coming back to the source!

Yes as with Peter and John and Moses, we must strive that people "take note" that we too "have been with Jesus". Do you see that these evil religious experts couldn't contend with these poor fishermen? They were left speechless with nothing to say, because the evidence stood there before them all to see. And yet as I said last time, such can be the blindness of religion, (false religion or even God's true religion falsely applied), that men refuse to see the Hand of God even when they see the evidence of that Hand before their very eyes! Verse 14 "but since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them there was nothing they could say." Friends, how clear it is that at the heart of false religion, that it wants, not to believe. These men wanted to be able to say something which was going to repudiate the claims of Peter and John. And yet the evidence was there staring them in the face: The crippled man was standing!

And yet also how clear it is, that of ourselves we are inherently evil! Genesis 6:5-6 "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth and his heart was filled with pain." Try and get your head around that brothers and sisters: That the God of the universe, yes the Creator of all things for the first time in all eternity, " His heart was filled with pain". Brothers and sisters, instead of attributing this wondrous thing that had taken place which they could see the evidence of standing before their very eyes to God, those so called high and mighty ones, (yes those mighty religious ones who claimed His Name), looked for a reason to explain it away and to conceal it!

Again verse 14- 15: "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." So yet again there is another council of war meeting. These men are just like that Jesus, they are saying. He was an ignorant commoner and yet "He spoke as one who had authority" they are just like Him. He did not fear us even at the threat of death and neither do they. What can we do?

Friends, can you see how adverse to the truth we are? Rather than accept the evidence, the overwhelming evidence which is presented to us of the Living God, we will do everything and anything, to turn aside from and to deny the truth that Jesus is Lord! v16 "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." Can you see what I said earlier about false religion wanting to not believe? What we have before us is a 'Pontius Pilate' moment. Do you remember after having found Jesus innocent of every false charge and wanting to release Him Pilate asks "who shall I release to

you? "Jesus who is called Christ or Barabbas?" Well the crowd cries out for Barabbas then Pilate says, "what then shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?" And of course the crowd cries out "crucify! Crucify!". Well, this is one of those moments. Overwhelming evidence on the one hand but evil enmity and intent on the other hand.

Beloved, each of us who follow Jesus must be brought to that point within our lives. The evidence of who Jesus is has been laid out before us? The question is, what will we do with that evidence? Well those upstanding religious men, come up with a plan. Though they cannot deny it verse 16, verse 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" v21 "after further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God."

Well as we saw last week from Ephesians 6:12 how clear it is that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." And what is their goal? To silence the gospel of Jesus, and to take all hope away of being set free. So keeping the people in bondage! Yes this is the fear which religion, (false religion that is), has of Christianity. That the bondage which they hold upon the people will be broken, and they will come to know the truth. The truth about Jesus! John 8:31-32 "to the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, if you hold to my teaching you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

But the wonderful thing about the gospel, (that truth about Jesus), the bigger the threat, the bigger the explosion of God's Kingdom. Verses 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. And v21 again "after further threats they let them go they could not decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened 22 for the man who was miraculously healed was over 40 years old."

Yes friends those marks which were seen and heard in the lives of these men cried out to the unsaved world that we "have been with Jesus." "For we cannot help speaking about that which we have seen and heard." You are right to "take note that we have been with Jesus" and He lives in us through His Spirit still. There is nothing that you can do or say to us which will silence us. His message, His truth, is our very breath!

So as I close this morning friends, my prayer for you, indeed for us all, is that we might be marked by those same things. Yes that the perishing world around us of family and friends , neighbours and colleagues, strangers in the street, might "take note" that we too "have been with Jesus."

Let's pray!