

Roy's sermon for 15/11/2020

## Acts 4:1-12 A cripple set free part 5: Beware Of Religion!

Last time in Acts 3:20-26 'A Cripple Set Free Part 4: It All Points To Jesus', we left Peter doing that very thing, while also pointing us to that ultimate time of refreshing: an eternity in heaven with our Lord! In Verse 20 Jesus has been appointed as both Saviour and Judge. In verse 21 He must remain in Heaven until the restoration of all things. The core of this is our broken relationship with God, which He has already won. But there are yet more who need to be called into His Kingdom. And all the prophets pointed to those days. Verse 22 Moses spoke of Christ as being another Prophet like himself, and whoever does not listen to Him will be "cut off". Verse 23 ignoring this truth will have eternal consequences. In verse 24 Peter reiterates that all the prophets spoke of the Christ. In Luke 24:18-27 Jesus took ownership of all of those truths declaring that they all pointed to Him. Verse 25 God keeps His promises. He sent His Son as He promised in Genesis 12 and Genesis 22, then finally verse 26 the purpose of Christ's coming was to turn God's people back to Himself! Then Peter's sermon to the people in the temple courts concludes, but the account of this healing and its ramifications continues!

'A Cripple Set Free Part 5: Beware Of Religion!' Now brothers and sisters, I feel I would be correct in suggesting that more damage has been done to the cause of Christ and Christianity from within those who claim His Name, than from the entire world of enmity and hatred from outside of the Church of Jesus. Yes, all through the history of Christendom among those falsely holding the banner of Christ have been the church's greatest enemies! The Spanish inquisition. The times of the Reformation when the reformers broke away from the tyranny of Roman Catholicism. And that enslavement to the evils of the Papacy with its, in effect, god-on-earth teachings and its man centred doctrines of penance, confessionals, the exalting of human priestly officers, along with the perversions which have gone hand in hand with that institution!

But of course, it hasn't only been the Romanists, no. All of the recognised denominations have had the same kinds of evil perversions amongst them. There have also been many self-styled 'Christs' which have arisen from amidst the faithful, planting seeds of confusion and division within the body and leading believers away. Paul warns in many of his letters about such things. Yes many have arisen leading the unaware away to their downfall. And more often than not, they come with all the hallmarks of 'Religion'. And this shouldn't surprise us, because the scriptures tell us that Satan comes to us as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 tell us "for such men are false apostles, deceitful work men, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve".

Mankind has been created by God as a worshipping being. We have been created to be in a relationship with Him, and to be worshipping the eternal God. So there is an inherent need for humanity to worship, because we are indeed spiritual beings. The problem is of course, that we have an inherent bent upon worshipping everything and everyone but Him who is worthy of our devotion. Even our Maker, God!

friends, before I begin, please don't think that I am saying that all recognised bodies of Christianity, are all inherently evil, I'm not saying that by any means. I am simply saying, (as I have said before), we must put our salvation into the hands of only One, and that is Jesus. He alone is infallible! Yes there is but One Son of God! So if we trust in religion for our salvation, as we will see, we will find ourselves in deep, even eternal trouble! So chapter 3:26 ends, but the scene continues. It's just that

the chapter division suggests otherwise. And it does appear from what follows that the new players in the account have witnessed and listened to everything which has taken place. Acts 4:1 "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people." So again, it does appear that they witnessed and listen to all that has taken place, since Peter and John had entered the temple courts, with the man who had been crippled, leaping up and down and praising God. And what's interesting is that here we have before us yet another response to the preaching of God's Word, and from the recognised church of the day. And specifically, the invoking of Jesus` Name. Firstly, the crippled man believes and is healed. Secondly, the crowd are amazed at what has taken place and yet they are ready to lift up Peter and John.

So now the religious elite, in verse 2 of chapter 4 "were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." Now friends, isn't this astounding. That religion can so blind us that we can fail to see the Hand of God before us, even when we can see the evidence of that Hand before our very eyes! We know that Saul`s religious zeal had so consumed and blinded him, that he was on the way to murder Christ's own church, before Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. He had to be actually made blind, before he could begin to see! Well in verse 2 of chapter 4, these men can't even see what God has done in the releasing of this man from over 40 years of physical, social, and spiritual bondage. He has been jumping up and down and praising God, and yet they are "greatly disturbed" And why? "Because "the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus name the resurrection of the dead."

This was the particular teaching which really galled the Sadducees. They did not believe in the eternal soul. They didn't believe in angels and heavenly beings, and they certainly didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead! So add the name of Jesus to this resurrection, and you really got their attention. So when Peter said in verse 13 of chapter 3 "you killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead" though the evidence testified to this truth, and the men claimed "we are witnesses of this" their religious loyalties kept the religious elite in such bondage, that they in effect, couldn't even see this miracle before their very eyes. Yes not only was Peter preaching of the resurrection, but that it had also come "in Jesus name."

Well they wouldn't put up with that. Not any of it. Verse 3 "they seized Peter and John and because it was evening they put them in gaol until the next day." Friends, how do the religions of the world deal with God's Truth preached in Jesus` name? Often with zealous hatred and violence. It has been that way since the Romans crucified, burned at the stake, and fed Christians to the Lions in Nero's day, and nothing has changed. And it stands to reason that this is how it will be! Because when truth amongst falsehood is proclaimed, yes when Light comes Into Darkness, that's when the battle really begins to be fought. John 3:19-21 "This is the verdict, light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

To varying degrees, this is the natural response of mankind, as they are led by the forces that bind them. Ephesians 6:12 "for 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 friends, clearly this is evidenced in the scene before us. A miracle from God has taken place, but in Jesus` Name and as proof of His and our resurrection. This thing must be put down! So they "seized Peter and John and put them in gaol." But Beloved, as is God's way, when Satan raises his hand against Christ's church, there is no contest. Because the victory has already been won. Jesus has gone to the cross and has defeated sin and death and risen from the grave in glorious triumph. As we can see in His victory in v4 "but many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about 5000." So 3000 on the day of Pentecost, and another 2000 it

appears upon the preaching of Peter's second message. So as Peter Marshall preached some weeks ago, and as Peter says in his sermon here before us brothers and sisters, the power is not in the man, the power to save His People is in the message!

No it wasn't the miracle which convicted these men, it was the proclamation of the Truth about Jesus. So it's not fancy programmes, it's not free for all anything goes services, it's not even miracles. It's the proclamation of God's Truth about who His Son was and is, preached in Jesus' Name! "But many who heard the message believed." Again, it's not who saw the miracle but who "believed the message."

Paul's final exhortation to Timothy not long before he was put to death emphasises this truth. 2 Timothy 4:1-2a "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his Kingdom, I give you this charge, preached the word." Yes it's through the preaching of God's Truth about Jesus only are people saved! But the pot of enmity and sedition by Satan had been stirred amongst the religious elite. The Jewish powers that be would not stand still as long as Christ's Name is preached, and they were losing their grip on the brethren! That's the other thing no doubt which had "disturbed them" the fact that the people were not only listening, but they were being converted. They were not only hearing, but they were coming to Christ!

So in verses 5-6 there is a council of war meeting. "The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem." And notice who's there, because it is very significant. Verse 6 "Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family." This is the same kangaroo court which had tried Jesus before He was taken to Pontius Pilate. So they all had a really keen interest to put any movement down, which was related to Jesus! Matthew 28:11-13 "while the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything which had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money telling them. You are to say his disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep."

So yes this evil hierarchy of the Jewish ruling elite, (the governing body of the church no less), had a vested interest in putting this Christian movement down. And as when Jesus was in this world, they would do all they could, to silence this threat to their authority! Brothers and sisters isn't it interesting, how all forms of authority are threatened by Christianity. Just as we can read in 1 & 2 Kings that often when a new King was crowned, the first thing which they did was to put to death any of their own family members who were a potential threat to their crown. And it seems that in Christ, the powers that be, seemed to have this deep seated fear and knowledge that they stand in the presence of a One, who commands the greatest of authority of the whole world. Even though they would never acknowledge this with their lips!

As in Jesus' parable of the vineyard owner. They would kill the son, and then they would have ownership of the garden. Which of course is what the Jewish elite had literally done! They'd killed all the prophets and now God's Own Son to whom those prophets pointed! Yes the truth about Jesus does seem to threaten, (not only the authorities), but also the self- assurance and self- sufficiency of us all! Verse 7 "they had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them. By what power or what name did you do this?" Now the question wasn't genuine because they all knew full well in whose name they did this thing. The only reason they asked the question I believe, was to somehow entrap the apostles. Perhaps they even believe that Peter and John might seek to hide who they were, and in whose name they spoke. Yes that the fear of the occasion might reduce the men into a bumbling and mumbling mess. But no. On the contrary. This Providence from God to speak on behalf of their Saviour in the power of the Holy Spirit, emboldened them all the more!

And friends, we should take great encouragement from their example. Because Jesus said we shouldn't worry about what we're going to have to say when we speak in His Name, because

through His Spirit, He will put the words in our mouth. We need simply to be in the scriptures and praying for wisdom, so that we do indeed speak in His Name and not in our own! Look at verse 8: "then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit." But is it that prior to this he was *not* "filled with the Holy Spirit?" Well no. Acts 2 verse 4: "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Holy Spirit enabled them." It is a term which is misused and abused today I believe. As I've explained before, we are all "filled with the Holy Spirit" the moment that we are saved, born again. It is not as though one day we are "filled with the Holy Spirit" and then the next day we are not "filled with the Holy Spirit". Because that would in effect mean that one day we are saved by the blood of Jesus and the next day we are not. But this can't be true, this can't be possible, praise God.

John 10:28-29 "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all no one can snatch them out of my father's hand."

No we are not seeing Peter have a top up of the Holy Spirit here. This is simply using an expression describing that Peter was emboldened by the Spirit of God. And he needed to be because he knew who these men were. He knew what authority and power they held. Remember, he was warming his hands around the fires of the soldiers while Jesus was being beaten and tried. Verse 8 "then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them rulers and elders of the people." And I believe he really must have belted his testimony out. Yes "rulers and elders of the people verse 9 if we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and asked how he was healed (verse 10) then know this, you and all the people of Israel, it is by the name of Jesus of Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed."

Can you imagine? These were the elite. These were the high and mighty ones. The same ones who had brought false charges against Jesus and had Him condemned to death, "though Pilate had decided to release him" (3:13). And they also had the power of life and death over Peter and John as well! And yet in the face of such evil, and the consequences which may follow, (as we saw in the temple courts), his words were like bullets from a sniper's rifle. Notice them: "called to account for an act of kindness" such was the evil intent of this crowd of evil and learned men, (yes these religious ones), and their fear and hatred of everything which spoke of Jesus, that they had arrested Peter and John "because of an act of kindness" done in the Saviour's Name!

And as in his first 2 sermons, Peter didn't miss them in their murderous religious hypocrisy. He declares by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified. Yes friends there is an irrational hatred which abounds everywhere of Christianity, isn't there. Kindnesses done in Jesus' Name have led to the martyrdom of millions of believers down throughout the millennia. Well we can see the root of it all before us here can't we. But Peter will not miss this Providence from God to declare his Saviour's Name and Truth, no. "It is by the name of Jesus Christ whom you crucified." He may have denied the name of Jesus three times before, but now three times he has preached the name of Jesus fearlessly, with boldness and conviction. Yes "it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified but God him raised from the dead." Do you remember why they were so "disturbed" in the first place? Verse 2 "they were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." So not only had he again preached that very thing which had so "disturbed" the religious elite in the first place, he then laid Jesus' death down at their feet, and with great power declared that Jesus no longer lies dead in the grave, but he in effect also declares that God raised him back to life, and he lives and reigns with God on high. And to top it all off, this nobody, this unschooled fisherman, quotes scripture at these 'fonts of all knowledge'. Quoting Psalm 118:22 "He is the stone you builders rejected which has become the capstone or cornerstone." The imagery is of a great building being built out of stone and as the foundations are being laid, a great stone is discarded as being unfit, unworthy for the purpose. And yet in the hands of the master builder, yes in the hands of God and according to his

plan, this stone is the very foundation upon which all things are built. And as Peter has applied this prophecy to Jesus, he is declaring to all of these evil priests and religious elite, that Jesus is the King. He is God's King. Yes the very King and the power whom you have rejected, has become that One, that foundation upon which God's Kingdom rests, lives and breathes!

But dear friends, it wasn't the man who could speak such things in his own strength, which cut to pieces the self- righteous judges before whom he stood. Because he spoke not in his own strength and not in his own name. The power came not in Peter, but in the Name of Him through whom he spoke. And while they are reeling from these words he hits them right between their eyes with his final assault in verse 12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men by which we must be saved."

Yes Beloved, we must beware of Religion. And of course I mean false Religion. Those institutions which have been devised by men through which they believe they can ingratiate themselves into God's good graces. Religion is not Christianity. Religion is about men; Christianity is about Jesus. Yes, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to man by which we must be saved."

Let's pray!