

RCC in the Word

Week of May 7

Acts 4.1-31

Too often in my conversations with non-believers, I am like the 2-ton elephant who is terrified of the tiny mouse. Although I know I should share the gospel or at least drop some nugget of good news, I keep silent. With feelings of guilt and remorse, I pray again, "Lord, next time give me courage. Help me to be a witness for you." For many of us, the thought of evangelism is absolutely frightening. We are afraid we will say the wrong thing. We are afraid we will be offensive. We are afraid we will be rejected. Like a hand over the mouth, fear silences us.

At the beginning of Acts 4, a group of religious leaders arrest Peter and John "because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (vs2). The day of their arrest, Peter and John miraculously healed a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (Acts 3.1-10). Following a night of imprisonment, Peter and John testify before the religious cabal regarding their message and miracles.

During the early years of the church, God gifted his apostles with miraculous gifts like speaking in tongues, healing and miracles to provide powerful evidence of the arrival of His kingdom. As a result of the miraculous signs and the Spirit-anointed preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lord "added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2.47). This rapidly growing movement threatens the religious establishment.

As Peter and John stand on trial before the religious tribunal, the leaders demand to know "by what power or by what name did you do this" (vs 7; referring to the healing of the lame man). With conviction and unshakable courage, Peter proclaims, "By the name of Jesus Christ, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well...There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (vs10,12). Astonished at the boldness of Peter and John, the Jewish authorities order the apostles to cease and desist speaking or teaching in Jesus' name (vs17).

Following their release, Peter and John immediately return to the church to report on their arrest, "trial" and release. The church realizes they face a powerful opposition and dangerous threats (4.21), but the church does not cower in fear. They do not abandon their mission. What do they do? They lift their voices together in prayer.

I wonder what I would have done if I was Peter and John? Would I have been brave enough to speak the truth in front men who had the authority and malevolence to harm me? As a member of the early church, would my prayers have been for opportunity to speak or the silencing of my enemies? As I consider my own fear in evangelizing, there is much I can learn from the example of these brothers and sisters. You see, in the face of tremendous fear, the early church did not fix their gaze on man. Instead, they looked to Almighty God. They set their hearts on the truth of who God is and, in those truths, they found tremendous courage to boldly proclaim the gospel.

As the church prays, they remember that God is the Sovereign Lord (vs24). The title Sovereign Lord is the translation of the Greek word *despotace* which refers to someone with complete authority and

control. As the Sovereign Lord, God alone is omnipotent. His power and authority are not thwarted or restricted by anyone or anything. He is sovereign over creation for he is the One “who made the heaven and the sea and everything in them” (vs24). By the power of his Word, the Sovereign Lord created all things (Genesis 1) and by his power, he upholds all he has made (Colossians 1.17). Our God is the Sovereign Lord of history fulfilling all his promises and ordaining every event. “For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do* whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (vs27-28). God orchestrated every event surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus just as the prophets foretold. “Who through the mouth of our father, David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit” (vs26). The presence and reality of the Sovereign Lord encouraged the threatened church to continue “to speak the word of God with boldness” (vs31).

The next time God gives you and me the opportunity to share the gospel, we need to follow the example set for us by our first-century family. Instead of looking at the unbeliever before us, we should lift our gaze to the Sovereign Lord remembering that his authority extends to all of creation, to all of history. With our eyes on our powerful God, the hand over our mouths will drop, and we can speak about the Lord Jesus Christ with great boldness.

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