

Acts 4:1-31 Kindness on Trial

“Here we see a series of similar confrontations, with each one building up to the crisis of Stephen’s death and persecution that followed.”ⁱ

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. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4 But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

- I. Three groups came up (they came to intimidate)
 - A. Religious, political, and civil authority (kind of like today)
 - B. Priests
 - C. Captain of the temple guard (Temple police)
 1. “The captain (Gr. *strategos*) of the temple guard was the commanding officer of the temple police force.
 2. This individual was second in command under the high priest.ⁱⁱ
 3. He apparently feared that this already excited throng of hearers might get out of control.”
 - D. Sadducees
 1. Came out of the Hellenistic era (Greek era “Alexander the Great)
 2. Political rulers

3. (Tied to the Romans more than any other group/ interested in power more than others)
4. Believed there was no resurrection
 - a) The resurrection changes everything! Every detail (how you treat people, your focus in life, etc.)

II. Peter / John - KEY PEOPLE

- A. Their message disturbed people!
- B. Focus was the resurrection - God has placed eternity in the hearts of man
- C. APPL: Our message of Christ should disturb people
 1. Religious people today resemble a base cult
 - a) Sex worship
 - b) Earth worship

III. Response: The Sadducees arrested Peter and John

- A. Because it was evening ... too late to start a trial
- B. Many people who heard their teaching (gospel) believed 5000

- C. “The problems of the early church continue and multiply, but so does the grace and power of the Spirit.”¹

5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

IV. Key Prosecution:

A. Annas: Unofficial high priest with Caiaphas during Jesus' trialⁱⁱⁱ

1. ‘Annas,’ whom Luke called the high priest here (v. 6), was technically not the high priest at this time.
2. served as high priest from A.D. 6 to 15
3. Annas continued to exert great influence (cf. Luke 3:2; John 18:13-24).
4. He was so powerful that Luke could refer to him as "the high priest," even though he was only the power behind the office (cf. Luke 3:2; John 18:13; Acts 7:1).
5. During this time, former high priests seem to have kept their titles and membership in the Sanhedrin.

B. Caiaphas: Son-in-law of Annas and official high priest during Jesus' earthly ministry (Matt. 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49-50).

¹ Bob Utley, “Acts” (Bible Lessons International, 2013), <https://bible.org/seriespage/acts-4>.

- C. John: Possibly Jonathan, son of Annas
 - D. Alexander: unknown
- V. “‘The Council’ (v. 15) before which soldiers brought Peter and John the next day was the Sanhedrin, which was the senate and supreme court of Israel.
- A. It consisted of the high priest, who served as its presiding officer, and 70 other men.”^{iv}
- VI. Key suspects: Peter and John
- A. “This is the first of four times some of Jesus’ followers stood before the Sanhedrin according to Acts. The others were Peter and the apostles (5:27), Stephen (6:12), and Paul (22:30).”^v
 - B. “The judges sat cross-legged in a half-circle on a raised platform.”^{vi}
- VII. Key Question: **“By what power or what name did you do this?”**
- A. “The Sanhedrin was acting within its jurisdiction when it convened to examine Peter and John. The Mosaic Law specified that whenever someone performed a miracle and used it as the basis for teaching, he was to be examined, and if the teaching were used to lead men away from the God of their fathers, the nation was responsible to stone him (Deut. 13:1-5). On the other hand, if his message was doctrinally sound, the miracle-worker was to be accepted as coming with a message from God.”^{vii}

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, 10 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. 11 Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the cornerstone.’

12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

VIII. Defence:

A. Filled with the Spirit

1. Controlled by the Spirit
2. The words that came out of their mouth were from God.
3. Concise
4. “Jesus had promised that when the disciples stood before hostile adversaries, God would give them the words to speak (Luke 21:12-15).”^{viii}

B. Addresses the Rulers and Elders

1. **If we are called to account for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed**
2. **the know this you and all Israel**
3. **It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,**
 - a) **whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead,**

“The Sanhedrin did not now or at any later time attempt to deny the fact that Jesus had arisen.”^{ix}

- b) **that this man stands before you healed.**
- c) **Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’**
- d) **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”**

(1) Exclusivity of Jesus

(2) CNN interviews

13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. 15 So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. 16 “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. 17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

IX. Saw the courage

A. as unschooled / spoke boldly and with great wisdom and insight

B. ordinary men / being used in an exceptional way

1. Satan wants you sidelined
2. John 3:30, **30** *He must increase, but I must decrease.*”
3. 2 Corthians 12:7-9, “7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep

me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

4. Peter

a) "It is not the critic who counts, not the person who points out where the doer of deeds could have done better," said Theodore Roosevelt, "the credit belongs to the person who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes up short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the devotions, and spends himself or herself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and at the worst, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his or her place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."^x

b) Fisherman to Supreme Court

C. Astonishment ensued

1. Took note: had been with Jesus
2. Wanted to say something but couldn't
3. Meeting time

a) Same confoundness during Jesus' ministry.

18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

- X. No speaking or teaching!
 - A. Cancel culture
 - B. Peter argues convincingly
 - C. **“Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him?”**
 - 1. **You be the judges!**
 - D. **20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”**
 - E. “In many parts of the world these days, Christians wonder if they should break the law in order to evangelize. The principle that the apostles followed, and that we should follow is: breaking the law is only legitimate when it requires (not just permits) us to disobey the Lord.”^{xi}

21 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 forty years old.

ⁱ Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

ⁱⁱ Josephus, *Antiquities of ...*, 20:6:1; 20:9:3; idem, *The Wars ...*, 2:17:1; 6:5:3). As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ All points taken from Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^{iv} Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^v Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^{vi} Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Reprint ed., Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 158. As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^{vii} Homer A. Kent Jr., *Jerusalem to Rome*. New Testament Studies Series (Brethren Missionary Herald, 1972; reprint ed.), (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House and BMH Books, 1985), 45-46. As quoted in Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^{viii} Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^{ix} Thomas Constable, “Notes on Acts” (2021 ed.), <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.

^x “He Had Bounce,” Sunday Sermons, <https://www.voicings.com/sermon/936>

^{xi} Thomas Constable, "Notes on Acts" (2021 ed.),
<https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/acts/acts.htm>.