

Acts 4:1-12: Do You See God as Theology Or Life-changing Power?

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I. Introduction

Do you ever apply Scripture to your life? I don't mean things like quoting Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, ..." and then saying to yourself, "I'm gonna claim this promise." But the next day you're still anxious about whatever it was that drove you to Philippians 4:6 in the first place. I mean do you ever take the Word of God and drill it down deep and personally into your life so that it truly changes your behavior, it truly takes away your fear, anxiety, and stress? When you study God's Word do you hear His voice guiding you, telling you where to turn next? Or is the Bible more like another boring textbook you study?

II. Acts 4:1-12: Do You Know God as a Subject in the Bible or as Life-changing Power?

4:1-4, Peter just healed a lame man and it drew a massive crowd. As John and Peter explain why it happened and by whose power, they're interrupted by some very powerful people. Who are they? The priests are 24 chief priests who are part of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Council/Court). The temple captain is the second most powerful man in the temple, second only to the high priest. The Sadducees were a wealthy, sophisticated, and well-educated Jewish party. They were powerful religiously and politically, controlled the high priesthood and held most of the seats on the Sanhedrin. And Peter and John have just enraged them because they have no permission to do what they're doing in the temple compound. That's not all, these authorities didn't like the content of their teaching: "they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." The authorities want to try them on the spot. But Jewish law forbade trials at night, so they jail them. What did the massive crowd (over 5,000) listening to Peter and John think about all this? They believed what Peter and John said about Jesus' power to resurrect.

Where do you stand on Jesus' power to resurrect? Are you with the authorities who were offended by it or with the people who saw what it could do (it took a lame man and made him walk!)? Do you believe in Jesus' power to resurrect? God says that His Son's death can save you from eternal damnation but He also says that His resurrection life can save you now (Romans 5:10). We're seeing what it can do with two uneducated fishermen named Peter and John. What do you think it can do for your life? Do you hear God speaking to you; is there something dead in your life you want Him to resurrect?

4:5-12, the next day, now that it's legal to try them, the entire Jewish Supreme Court convenes: rulers (24 chief priests), the elders and scribes (Pharisees), Annas the high priest and many who were part of his family including Caiaphas—this is Annas' son-in-law, he and Annas served as high priests simultaneously (Luke 3:2) but Annas was the real power behind the high priesthood, John (Jonathan) and Alexander (both sons of Annas and later serve as high priests). They assemble in Jerusalem to address this egregious matter. They begin by asking Peter and John a very demeaning question. They in essence say, "Who the hell are you to be doing this and by what magic or in whose wicked name have you done this?" Imagine being forced to stand before the Supreme Court of the United States and the Chief Justice says to you, "It's clear you had no right to do what you did. But tell me, by what nefarious trickery did you pull this off?" And to add insult to injury, you have absolutely no legal training. That's what's happening to Peter and John right now. Does Peter back down because he's facing this powerful body and their accusatory question?

No, this is not the same Peter who was terrified by a servant girl's question regarding whether or not he knew Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75). Peter now knows and is living by Jesus' resurrection power. It is Jesus' Spirit who now dwells in Peter and it is by His Spirit that Peter now speaks without any fear. Not only is Peter not afraid of this religious body who controls everything in Israel, he uses sarcasm and turns the tables on them: he indicts them with the crime of murder!

Peter's sarcastic response is basically this, "Let me get this straight, you're accusing us of doing a good deed for a helpless man and you want to know by what wicked power we did it?" So Peter answers their two questions regarding the power and name behind the man's healing. He says, "Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, **whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead**, by Him this man stands here before you whole."—this is further sarcasm, i.e., the lame man was arrested with Peter and John. His crime: being healed! And here we have the real reason why the Sanhedrin was so enraged.

Before Jesus' death, He went through six trials, one of them was before the Sanhedrin. This trial was illegal in many respects, including the fact that they held it at night. The end result of that trial is that they convicted Jesus of a capital offense and sent Him off to Pilate for execution (Matthew 26:57-68; John 18:28-35). And this is Peter's accusation against the Sanhedrin; they crucified Jesus. Then Peter mentions the second thing they hate: resurrection. The Sanhedrin was made up of 71 men, 70 + the high priest. Most of them were Sadducees. The Sadducees only recognize the first 5 books of the Bible as authoritative (the books Moses wrote). They also didn't believe in demons, angels, or resurrection. But Peter tells them point blank that resurrection is real and that the very One they crucified a few months ago is alive and well because God raised Him from the dead! And it is by His power that the lame man now stands before the Sanhedrin well.

Peter doesn't stop there, he doubles down on his indictment by applying Psalm 118:22 to the entire Sanhedrin. Psalm 118 is about Messiah: many came up against Him; they pushed violently against Him, but God would not allow death to take Him. Thus, the very One whom they rejected, God has exalted; He has made Him the Chief Cornerstone upon which the entire building stands. And now they are in dire straits because they have rejected the only name under heaven that can save them, "Jesus." Because they have done this, they will be ground to powder (Matthew 21:33-46). This is why the Sanhedrin is eager to shut Peter and John up. They don't want their crime exposed and they certainly don't want the people to believe in Jesus' power to resurrect.

Do you know God's Word as Book-learnin' or Life-learnin'? God's Word is not designed to simply pass on information, it's there to give you practical instructions on life. The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection. When they read the phrase "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" all they saw was theology. When Jesus read it, He saw a lesson on God's power to resurrect (Matthew 22:23-33). When the Sanhedrin read Psalm 118, they likely saw a theology lesson on Messiah. When Jesus and Peter read Psalm 118, they saw exactly what the Sanhedrin would do to Jesus and how it would lead to Jesus' exaltation and the Sanhedrin's destruction (Matthew 21:33-46). Understanding God's Word this way enables you to interpret all of life this way, which means getting instructions on life from God's creation too (Matthew 6:25-34).

III. Conclusion

"If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, ..."