**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Thirteenth Week Since the Resurrection

***In Jesus’ Power & Name ~ Acts 4***

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July 12th In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

 We know that after Pentecost, the Apostles are in high spiritual gear due to having received additional empowerment from God’s Holy Spirit. With the Lord’s Great Commission (Matthew 28:18ff) powering them, they don’t waste any time going to the Jewish public, at the Temple, with the Gospel Message, in the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus is the sticking point and the point at which the Temple authorities take note. Anyone with traditional common sense would think it is not a good idea to get in the face of the authorities, who just a few months previously crucified the man who was your leader. But, no, they not only give the opening sermon we read in Acts 2, but they continue with healing a man who had been a fixture at the Beautiful Gate leading into the Temple. Preaching and healing in the name of Jesus was the order of their day.

 The text of Acts 4 is like reading a western showdown at high noon. Starting in verse one. In the face of severe opposition, God was pressing His Message through the Apostles.

1 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them,

2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

 Peter and John were in trouble with the Jewish leaders on two counts, proclaiming in Jesus’ name and preaching the resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection of the dead; the Pharisees did. The Sadducees were in charge of the Temple where Peter and John were preaching and healing. The Sanhedrin were assemblies of Elders who made up the court system at the Temple and in Israel.

 3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day,

for it was already evening.

In our time, and in our nation, we can speak openly about the Good News of Jesus Christ. However, we are not guaranteed freedom of speech on private property. My experience is that you can talk openly about your faith. People do not have to listen and can walk away. Believers do not want to be obnoxious in forcing their witness. We want God’s Message to be accepted. In our American system, we have the view that at least we want to be heard. We cannot count on the secular media to allow us use of the airways in prime time. The networks operate under a public license, but are privately owned. We do see that there are many religious broadcasts on T.V., radio and digital media that there is almost a saturation point. The challenge in America is for a person to receive the Message of Biblical Christianity. We know the word “Christianity” has many definitions in the world. It is understandable why so many, after listening to the noise of religion, tune-out and turn off the whole conversation. This is where freedom of choice and conscious are to be applied. I personally would not have it any other way. Under this system we have the choice to choose in an unobstructed environment.

In examining what Peter and John were doing, we see they went to what would be considered a public place owned by the government. The Jewish government was a theocracy operating under the watchful eye of the secular/pagan Roman government. Today, this would be the equivalent of going to the public square or the county courthouse square. In the 1st century Jerusalem, it was acceptable to talk about your beliefs at the Temple. However, since there was a Jewish Theocracy in place, statements about beliefs were accepted if they were within the Jewish belief system ascribed by the ruling Jewish leaders and judged by the Sanhedrin.

**Peter and John in America**

We have religious freedom in America. But we do not have freedom to speak anywhere. In our American system, if a person were to go to the headquarters of a religious organization and speak contrary to that organization’s teaching, they could legally be asked to leave. If they refused to leave, they could be arrested for criminal trespass. Again, private property owner’s rights. So, Peter and John, doing the same thing today they did, recorded in Acts, could have been stopped and removed under our laws. They would not be charged for what they said but for not leaving the premises when asked to do so by the property owner. In the account chronicled in Acts, Peter and John were arrested for what they said.

We are fortunate that the American government is not to establish a religion or interfere with the free exercise of religion. Of late, the government has been interfering with the free exercise of religion by a state government closing a Christian bakery for refusing to bake a cake for a homosexual wedding. This case was overturned by federal courts. It appears to me that some states in America have established their own secular religion of “*governism*” with High Priests from the H.A.S. community adhering and forced worship of Evolutionary Darwinism.

(Humanist, Atheist, Secularist - H.A.S.)

1st Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

I see it is worth observing that religion is the first of five rights addressed by the Bill of Rights. The second - speech, third - press, fourth -peacefully assemble, fifth – petition the Government. My observation is that without addressing religion, all the others are useless. What a people believes determines their speech, press, assembly and petitions. If the government could establish a religion then they could, and would, control speech, press, assembly and petitions. This is exactly what the Dark Age State Church did. America’s founding fathers knew this and constructed the 1st Amendment to address the main civil rights pillars of the Republic.

Peter and John were Jews, but they were talking about things that the particular sect within Judaism, who oversaw the Temple, did not believe, (resurrection of the dead) and in the name of Jesus.

**Temple Authorities Cautious**

You will know them by their fruit. This is a saying of Jesus. So, what kind of fruit was produced, due to the preaching and healing in Jesus’ name, by Peter and John.

**Matthew 7:14** "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruit.

**Continue Acts 4 in verse 4** But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

 Peter and John were on a roll. 3000 in Acts 2:41 surrendered to Christ. Here in their second sermon, another 5000 souls. That is 8000 converts to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the one who rose from the dead, the one who was prophesied by the prophets of old. Right under the noses of the Jewish religious leaders, 8000 citizens just rejected the teachings of their own Theocracy. The same Jewish leaders who had been concerned about Jesus, here they came to address Peter and John. However, with so many people responding to their Message, the Temple leadership was cautious in their dealings with Peter and John.

 5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem;

 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

 7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire,

 "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

In our American system of law, Peter and John would have constitutional rights upon which to call. I mean, at this point, a normal person in the face of high legal authorities might lawyer-up. Plead the 5th amendment and not make any incriminating statements. After-all, Peter and John knew their lives could be on the line. Of course, Peter and John had no such rights. They did have some rights under Jewish law, but, as we saw with Jesus, the Temple leadership did not follow their own rules. Jesus was illegally tried at night and false testimony was used.

“By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” The question that looks for a conviction right from the start. Obviously, Jesus’ authority threatens the Jewish religious leaders. Remember, in commissioning the Apostles recorded in Matthew 28:

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The mindset of Peter and John was that their authority to preach, teach and heal was superior to the Temple authorities. They were commissioned by God in the Resurrected life.

“By what power?” The teacher of Israel, a member of the Pharisees, and at least influential with the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus and questioned Him about how He can do the things He does. This is the same question Peter and John are being asked by the Temple authorities. If the Temple leaders would have been tuned-in to God, they would have known the power and authority Peter and John used. It should have been under the same power and authority. But they asked, in a trial, pursuing doing away with Peter and John. They were under a different power and authority, not from God.

**John 3:**1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

**Blessed**

If anyone thought God came to be one of us and believed there would **not** be serious push-back, then they are **not** understanding the total depravity of humanity. Remember, the goal of Satan is to move people away from God’s plan for their life. This started with Adam and Eve. *Do not listen to God. Listen to yourself and go with what you want.* What is wrong about preaching love, grace and forgiveness of sin? What possibly could go wrong with saying. . . Matthew 5

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

 5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

 7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Jesus tells us what will go wrong. However, in living-out the consequences of preaching and healing in Jesus’ name to a totally depraved world, we are still blessed.

 10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

 12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

 What would you do in this situation? A person could say their words were ill-spoken and not well thought-out, not realizing the full implications of their meaning. Basically, a full retraction and apology with a hope to go home and not be thrown in a dungeon, held over for a flogging. But no, Peter and John went straight to the points that could lead to their conviction.

 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

"Rulers and elders of the people,

 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man,

as to how this man has been made well,

 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel,

that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene,

 **whom you crucified**,

**whom God raised from the dead—**

by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

 11 "He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone.

 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

 13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

 15 But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another,

“Know them by their fruit”

 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

 17 "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

 18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "**Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;**

 20 **for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."**

 21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) **on account of the people**, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened;

 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

 23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

 We, too, need to tell our friends and neighbors about the victories in our lives due to our looking to and following God. I know many of us do. I encourage all of us to witness the work of God in our lives. On a day-to-day basis, these are simple things. The miracle of God, in this fallen world, in the midst of the storm we see today, is the day-to-day Believer’s walk filled with the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. With these Spiritual fruits working in our hearts, the fallen world receives the Great Commission.

These Spiritual fruits come to us in the name and power of Jesus, the incarnated God. These Spiritual fruits are our power and authority to witness and live the Gospel Message.

 **Amen**