

Chapter 9: No Other Name

Acts 4:1–22

We have seen numerous parallels between the Book of Acts and the Gospels of the life of Jesus so far in the forty days of preparation for ministry, in the two men that appear at Jesus' ascension (just as they had at his empty tomb), and in the miraculous healing of a paralyzed man. These parallels demonstrate that the apostles are not a disillusioned group trying to forge a new path forward now that Jesus has died. Rather, they are witnesses to the resurrected Christ who are carrying forward the ministry of "all that Jesus began to do and to teach" during his earthly life and ministry (Acts 1:1). Whereas the healing story from Acts 3 paralleled Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Luke 5, the opposition of the leaders here seems to parallel the events of Luke 19–20, from the final week of Jesus' life as our Lord approached the cross. These parallels encourage us that, *because there is no salvation outside of Christ, Christians can suffer boldly.*

Suffering is Inevitable (Acts 4:1–4)

While the apostles have carried forward their ministry in a relatively straightforward manner so far with "no resistance," now the "picture changes."¹ Just as Jesus' ministry could not move forward for long without opposition from the Jewish religious leaders, so now the religious leaders begin to arise against Jesus' apostles who minister in his stead. In the story of the healing in the previous chapter, Luke had largely narrated the actions and words of Peter; however, he also noted John's presence beside Peter (Acts 3:1, 3, 4, 11). Luke told us only about how Peter had spoken in the great sermon in Solomon's Portico, but now again Luke zooms out to capture the involvement of John in this ministry: "And as *they* were speaking to the people..." (v. 1a, emphasis added).² Although Peter was the recognized leader of Jesus' apostles both during and after Jesus' earthly life and ministry, the Scriptures go to great lengths to show that Peter was not set apart in a class by himself. He is never portrayed as a pope (contrary to the anachronistic claims of the Roman Catholic Church), but as *primus inter pares*, the first among equals.

While Peter and John were speaking, "the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (vv. 1b–2). Bruce explains that "The 'captain of the temple,' the chief of the temple police, was responsible for maintaining order in the temple courts, and he may have had misgivings lest the obstruction caused by so large a crowd might lead to a riot."³ The priests and Sadducees, on the other hand, were closely aligned, since the "chief-priestly

¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 137.

² Polhill, *Acts*, 138–39.

³ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 95.

families belonged” to the Sadducees, and they Sadducees taught that there is no resurrection (Acts 23:8).⁴ Polhill notes, however, that the objection may extend beyond a general opposition to the doctrine of the resurrection, since the apostles were “proclaiming *in Jesus* the resurrection from the dead”: “The Sadducees’ annoyance at Peter and John’s witness to the resurrection was not so much theological as political, as was generally the case with the Sadducees....The idea of a general resurrection was an apocalyptic concept with all sorts of messianic overtones. Messianic ideas among the Jews of that day meant revolt, overthrow of the foreign overlords, and restoration of the Davidic kingdom.”⁵ The chief priests had long worried that messianic fervor around Jesus might cause the sorts of problems that could deprive the Jews of both their “place...and nation” (John 11:48).

So, “they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening” (v. 3). In part, this is simply a record of the facts of the history as it proceeded, since “an hour or two at least must have gone by since the afternoon prayers for which Peter and John had gone up to the temple in the first instance, and there was no time to hold an inquiry into the apostles’ conduct before sundown.”⁶ Beyond that fact, Luke is narrating this scene in such a way as to echo the proceedings surrounding the trial of Jesus, who was also arrested overnight.⁷ Indeed, Peter and John had been the only ones present to witness the trial of Jesus firsthand (John 18:15–16)! In the Gospels, however, Jesus healed the paralytic at the beginning of his public, earthly ministry (Luke 5). He was not arrested, though, until the very end of the story, after a long process for the opposition of the religious leaders to grow. Here, the apostles’ healing of the lame man is followed immediately by formal religious persecution that echoes the trial of Jesus before his crucifixion. The point is simple: since Jesus has suffered, there is to be no grace period for the suffering of his people. We must follow immediately behind our Lord, taking up our cross to follow our crucified and resurrected Lord.

In the midst of the persecution, however, Luke tells us that the gospel proceeded without hindrance: “But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand” (v. 4). Although “this was a hard beginning for novices,” nevertheless the

⁴ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 95–96.

⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 139–40.

⁶ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 96. See also Polhill: “The Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin, had jurisdiction over matters of temple violation. It met regularly each day, with the exception of Sabbaths and feast days. Since it was now already evening and the Sanhedrin had already recessed, Peter and John would have to be detained until the court reconvened in the morning.” (Polhill, *Acts*, 140.)

⁷ “They were compelled to stand on the lower floor ‘in the midst,’ the judges facing them from all sides. This was the exact manner in which and the exact place where Jesus had stood when facing this court. What memories, what anticipation must have crowded the apostles’ minds! Caiaphas must have presided as he had done when Jesus was tried. But no crime is charged against them, no row of witnesses confronts the disciples. This is only a judicial investigation; the apostles are asked to make a statement regarding themselves.” (Lanski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 158.) Although none of the Gospel accounts record Jesus as being “in the midst/middle” of the Sanhedrin for his trial (cf. Mark 14:60), Polhill notes that this idea “comports well with the rabbinic statement that the Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle: ‘The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so that they might all see one another. Before them stood the two scribes of the judges, one to the right and one to the left, and they wrote down the words of them that favored acquittal and the words of them that favored conviction.’” (Polhill, *Acts*, 142, citing “Mishnah Sanhedrin” 4:3. Available online: <https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sanhedrin>)

Lord was demonstrating that “a few men unarmed, furnished with no garrisons, do show forth more power in their voice alone, than all the world, by raging against them.”⁸ The legal wrangling will continue, since “the wicked...are always ready at an inch to stop the mouth of the servants of Christ” with “some show of law and equity.”⁹ Nevertheless, Luke is telling us from the outset of this story that the Lord is powerfully at work.

No Salvation Outside of Christ (Acts 4:5–12)

After a night’s imprisonment, the full “Sanhedrin” (ESV: “council,” v. 15, from συνεδρίον; *sunedrion*) gathers for a judicial inquiry into the preaching of Peter and John: “On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family” (vv. 5–7a). The term “Sanhedrin” conveys the idea of “sitting together,” and it was “a common administrative term” for “a governing board, *council*.”¹⁰ It is worth noting that the early church did not abolish these Jewish forms of government, as is clear from the use of the alternative term “Presbytery” (πρεσβυτέριον; *presbyterion*) to describe the Jewish council of elders that condemned Jesus and Paul (Luke 22:66; Acts 22:5), but is also used to describe the “council of elders” who laid hands on Timothy to ordain him to gospel ministry in the church (1 Tim. 4:14). Accordingly, it is worth noting that Presbyterian churches use the Latin translation of the Greek term *Sanhedrin* to describe the council of elders that “sits together” (*sessio*) to oversee the local church: the *Session*. The Jewish form of government was retained in the early church, even as the leaders who had been appointed to that government were rejected because they did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah.¹¹ Thus, Luke tells us that the men making inquiries of Peter and John were “*their* rulers and elders and scribes” (v. 5, emphasis added): “the word [*their*] is used here to distinguish the leadership of old Israel from the leadership of the new.”¹²

As the Sanhedrin convenes, they ask a two-part question that attempts to identify the authority by which Peter and John had been preaching: “And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’” (v. 7b). This is an important question, since here we see the first echo of the allusion to Luke 19–20. Right after Jesus had cleared the temple upon his triumphant arrival into Jerusalem (Luke 19:45–48), and as he was “teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and scribes and elders came up and said to him, ‘Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority’” (Luke 20:1–2). Note the parallels: the temple setting (especially in relation to an action that threatened the authority of the rulers of the temple, in that Peter and John had healed the man who had not been permitted into the temple), preaching and teaching the people, and the rulers who demanded to know by what authority Jesus, and now Peter and John, are doing what they are

⁸ Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:167.

⁹ Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:164–65.

¹⁰ Arndt et al., *BDAG*, 967.

¹¹ For more on this point, see Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature, and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1832).

¹² Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 189.

doing.¹³ As Bruce observes, “Only a few weeks had passed since they had both taken a hand in the condemnation of Jesus. Their hope that they had got rid of Him was but short-lived; it looked as if they were going to have even more trouble on His account than they had had before His crucifixion.”¹⁴

As Peter prepares to answer, Luke tells us specifically that Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 8a), which is “the first fulfillment of the Lord’s promise given in Matt. 10:19, 20....He and John had not lain awake all night planning what to say....It is the Holy Spirit who puts this telling defense into Peter’s mouth.”¹⁵ In this context, it is also worth remembering the way that Peter acted when he had last attended a trial before the Sanhedrin and had denied the Lord three times: “surely, seeing he had denied his Master, Christ, being afraid at the voice of a silly woman, (Matthew 26:70,) he should have utterly fainted in such an assembly, when he did only behold their pomp, unless he had been upholden by the power of the Spirit.”¹⁶

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter’s response is masterful, beginning at the opening of his address that (respectfully) points out the absurdity of the proceedings: “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed...” (v. 8b–9). What Peter’s response makes plain—although without saying it explicitly—is that “the Sanhedrin should investigate crimes and not good deeds. Yet...Peter is certainly ready to furnish the fullest information” if they are indeed inquiring.¹⁷

Beyond the playfulness of his opening address, the ESV translation hides the most important point that Peter smuggles in to his address from the very beginning, by the translation “by what means this man has been *healed*.” The word here is σωζω (*sōzō*), the common word that means “to save.” *Healed* is an entirely appropriate translation in this context to deal with the man’s physical healing, but the word has broader overtones that move beyond healing of the body into the salvation of the soul. Importantly, this is the same verb that appears in v. 12: “no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be *saved*.”¹⁸ Although Peter must unpack his meaning further, he is saying from the very beginning that the man had been *fully* saved—physically and spiritually—through faith in the name of Jesus.

So, to answer the question posed to him, Peter bears clear witness to the power of the name of Jesus:¹⁹ “let it be known to all of you 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 is standing before you well” (v. 10). As Bruce notes in continuity with Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost and the day before at Solomon’s Portico (Acts 2:36; 3:13–15), “again we mark the pointed contrast between their treatment of Him and God’s.”²⁰ Surely this must have been a blow to the Sanhedrin, since they

¹³ “Name is taken in this place for authority.” (Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:169.)

¹⁴ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 98.

¹⁵ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 160–61.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:169.

¹⁷ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 161.

¹⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, 143.

¹⁹ “So that the miracle giveth him occasion to preach the resurrection of Christ.” (Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:171.)

²⁰ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 99.

had hoped to silence Jesus by crucifying him and by covering up his resurrection (Matt. 28:11–15); however, here the fact of Jesus' resurrection faced them with "even stronger evidence than that which the Roman guard brought from the tomb. No dead Jesus could work a miracle such as this; the risen and glorified Jesus alone could do that. So Jesus had healed when he was alive; lo, so he had healed now after this Sanhedrin had crucified him!"²¹

Next, Peter quotes Psalm 118:22: "This Jesus²² is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone" (v. 11). There is much to say about this, but we should first remember that Jesus himself had cited this verse as a prophecy about himself in the parable he told in Luke 20:9–18. This is important, since it builds out the way that Luke using echoes from Luke 19–20 to build out an extended allusion to that scene leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. What does this psalm teach? Peterson is helpful: "In the original context of the psalm, the stone is either Israel or Israel's king, rejected by the nations but chosen by God for the accomplishment of his purpose."²³ Here, however, the subject is clearly not Israel as a nation, but Israel reconstituted in the person of Christ.²⁴ The horrifying implication of both Jesus' crucifixion and now about the apostles' persecution is that the "builders," then, are not the nations as a whole, but the religious leaders of God's people: "The ironic image is of a temple being built as a people of God although the key ingredient for God's presence has been rejected."²⁵ One thinks of Noah in the length of time it took him to build the ark. Although the vessel of salvation was being built in their midst, none of the people embraced it outside of Noah's sons and their wives. In their faithlessness, they ultimately perished.

To press this point further, Peter puts the centrality of Jesus for salvation in the starkest possible terms: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12). Although the religious leaders believed that their temple, priesthood, and sacrifices would save them, Peter and John had now healed a lame man in the name of Jesus whom the temple had been powerless to heal throughout the course of his life. Therefore, there is salvation in no one and nothing else, for in the name of Jesus alone God has appointed salvation. As Bruce summarizes, "And from the once despised but now glorified Jesus, and from Him alone, could true salvation come—not merely healing from a physical affliction, such as the cripple at the Beautiful Gate had received, but healing from the spiritual disease of sin and deliverance from coming judgment as well."²⁶ As a name "under heaven," Peter is rejecting any view that we can ascend to heaven on our own: "Therefore, seeing we are so far from the kingdom of God, it is needful that God do not only invite us unto himself, but that reaching out his hand he offer salvation

²¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

²² As the ESV footnote states, the Greek has only οὗτος. (*houtos*), "this one," without the name of Jesus. The context makes the subject clear without a doubt, and the subject referenced is not far away ("Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead"; v. 10a); however, it does help for the ESV to add the name since the more immediate referent would be "this man" (οὗτος) in v. 10b).

²³ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 192.

²⁴ "But, as in so many other instances, the purpose of God for Israel finds its fulfilment in the single-handed work of Christ." (Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 100.)

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 193.

²⁶ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 100–01.

unto us, that we may enjoy the same.”²⁷ Finally, the word for “must” in this passage is strong, describing a “divine necessity...that should be communicated to everyone about calling upon the name that God has provided.”²⁸

Christians Can Suffer Boldly (Acts 4:13–22)

If the religious leaders believed that they could quickly put down this seditious talk of resurrection in Jesus, they were taken aback by this powerful testimony from the apostles (and, note again the inclusion of John): “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished” (v. 13a). Literally, they perceived that the men were “unlettered” and ἰδιώτης (*idiōtēs*), i.e., “a person who is relatively unskilled or inexperienced in some activity or field of knowledge, *layperson*, *amateur* in contrast to an expert or specialist of any kind.”²⁹ In the face of the Supreme Court of the Jewish people, they preached Christ boldly and with authority. The connection between their astonishment and the following phrase is somewhat ambiguous: “And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (v. 13b). In what sense did they recognize their association with Jesus? With a growing sense of an old, familiar dread? With a sudden surprise when the connection had been made plain? Regardless, Jesus also “had sat at the feet of no eminent rabbi, and yet He taught with an authority which they could well remember....And plainly He had imparted the same gift to His disciples.”³⁰

Regardless of the discomfort of being embarrassed by the apostles of the man they had crucified, there was nothing that they could do about it: “But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition” (v. 14). So, in their confusion, they confer about the best way to proceed with such a no-win situation for them: “But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name’” (vv. 15–17). Rather than repent, they schemed about how to double-down against the inconvenience of the miraculously healed lame man in front of them. Lenski is right: “This is the blindness of unbelief.”³¹

To return to the theme of the ongoing allusion back to Luke 19–20, this passage also sounds like the deliberation of the leaders about how to answer Jesus’ question of by what authority he has performed his own signs (Luke 20:1–8). Again, let us remember that there was a two-part question there too: “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority” (Luke 20:2), and, as we have noted, the two-part inquiry into the name and authority of Peter and John here mirrors that question there. There, Jesus responded with his own question, to ask whether the authority of John the Baptist came from heaven or from man (Luke 20:3–4). In response to that question, the leaders conferred to strategize about how best to answer the question, since “all the

²⁷ Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, 1:174.

²⁸ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 193.

²⁹ Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 468.

³⁰ Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 102.

³¹ Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 170.

people...are convinced that John was a prophet” (Luke 20:6). Here, the religious leaders admit, with sorrow, that they cannot deny “that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (v. 16). When the religious leaders tell Jesus that they do not know the source of John’s authority, Jesus tells him that he will not tell them the source of his authority either (Luke 20:8).

Here, though, the religious leaders try in vain to bottle up the message by a naked appeal to their own authority: “But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name” (v. 17). The scope of the prohibition is emphatic: no longer (μηκέτι; *mēketi*) to none of the men (μηδενὶ ἀνθρώπων; *mēdeni anthrōpōn*). “So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (v. 18). This only tees up another extraordinary response from the apostles: “But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’” (vv. 19–20). As commentators point out, these words echo the words of the Greek philosopher Socrates, as quoted in Plato’s writings, which would “seem a bit ironic if these unlearned and common men (v. 13) were throwing the words of the Greek philosopher at them.”³²

In the conclusion to this story, we read that “And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened” (v. 21). Here we find the final connection to Luke 19–20. After Jesus declined to answer the question of the religious leaders about the authority by which he acted, he then told the parable of the wicked tenants, which culminates with the quotation about the stone that the builders rejected from Psalm 118 (Luke 20:17), which Peter quoted earlier (v. 11). In response, the “scribes and chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them” (Luke 20:19a). The only reason they did not is that “they feared the people” (Luke 20:19b). Once again, the fear of the people from the religious leaders limited them from laying hands on God’s servants. In this case, the miracle was especially extraordinary, since Luke leaves until now the age of the man who had been healed: “For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old” (v. 22). Although this healing was a “sign” that verified and confirmed the authority of Jesus, the religious leaders persist in their unbelief.³³

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the different groups of people who come to arrest Peter and John (v. 1)? What might their different motivations have been (v. 2)? How does this disturbance in the temple parallel the disturbance in the temple that Jesus caused when he cleansed the temple and taught (Luke 19:45–48)? In that case and in this case, how are the people as a whole responding to the preaching and teaching about Jesus (v. 4)? What does this teach us about the inevitability of suffering for believers?
2. What kind of council did the rulers, elders, and scribes, along with the high priestly families, represent (vv. 5–6)? Why did they ask about the power and the name in which Peter and John

³² Polhill, *Acts*, 146.

³³ Polhill, *Acts*, 147.

healed the man and were teaching (v. 7)? How does Peter respectfully criticize the proceedings (vv. 8–9)? How does he confront the rulers (v. 10)? What is the significance of Psalm 118:22 (v. 11; cp. Luke 20:17)? Reflect on the full significance of v. 12. How should you respond to this truth?

3. In what sense did Peter and John exhibit “boldness” (v. 13a)? In what sense were they “uneducated, common men” (v. 13b)? What is the significance of the fact that “they had been with Jesus” (v. 13c)? How do the deliberations of the council compare with the deliberations of the rulers in Luke 20:5–6? How much success do the religious leaders have when they try to press their advantages against the apostles (vv. 18–21)? Why do they fail (v. 22)?

4. Whom do you need to speak to with boldness (not disrespect, but boldness) today? Do you need to speak to God to confess your sins and seek the salvation that Jesus offers? Do you need to apologize to someone for something you are reluctant to confess? Do you need to encourage someone to turn from sin and turn to Christ in faith? Do you need to tell someone that salvation is found in no one other than Jesus? Where do you need to suffer boldly today?