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We Speak of What We Have Seen and Heard

Racial Reconciliation Sunday

Scripture: Acts 4:13-22

Sermon Series: *The Acts of Jesus Today*

Topic: Salvation, Proclamation, Racism



Acts 4:13-22 (ESV)

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." ²¹ 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. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

Introduction

The people of Jerusalem had witnessed a miracle. A man who was born lame¹ had suddenly and unexpectedly been healed. This man was more than 40 years old. He had never walked a day in his life. His friends daily laid him at the entrance of the temple in order for him to receive alms from worshipers.² This is how he made his living. This was all he could do. Everyone who entered the temple saw him as they walked past him. This had been the daily routine for probably more than three decades. The whole city knew this man.

One day, as Peter and John were about to enter the temple to pray at the time of the afternoon sacrifice, they were suddenly moved by the Holy Spirit to stop and pray for this lame man in the name of **Jesus of Nazareth**³ and Jesus healed this man immediately. This wonderful miracle captured everyone's attention, including "*the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees.*"⁴

The Sadducees were particularly offended because when Peter explained the people that it was Jesus of Nazareth who healed this man and not him or John, he made it clear that Jesus of Nazareth was the one whom God "*had raised from the dead.*"⁵

¹ Acts 3:2.

² Ibid.

³ Acts 3:6.

⁴ Acts 4:1.

⁵ Acts 3:15.

As Ben mentioned last Sunday, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (thus they were sad, you see?). This group of officials had Peter, John, and this newly healed man arrested and thrown in jail overnight.

The next morning⁶ the council was convened and they inquired of Peter and John “*by what power or by what name*”⁷ this man had been healed. Peter, “*filled with the Holy Spirit*”⁸ answered very boldly, saying,

...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. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² 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.”
Acts 4:10-12 (ESV)

The Boldness of Peter & John (v.13)

Luke, the author of this account, tells us that Peter was “*full of the Holy Spirit*” (4:8). He was not answering from his own wisdom or persuasiveness. He answered by the influence of the Holy Spirit within him. What Peter declared therefore was the truth because the Spirit of Truth⁹ was giving him the words God wanted him to speak in this moment.¹⁰

Peter was boldly declaring that not only does physical healing come from Jesus of Nazareth, but so also does spiritual healing. ***There is no other name whereby one can be saved other than through the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*** (Ben Paulk offered an excellent sermon last week on this truth the global implications thereof.) The whole council was amazed by this response and the boldness with which these two apostles spoke.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (ESV)

The council members were astonished by the fact that Peter and John were “*uneducated, common men.*” In the Greek, they were ἀγράμματοί (*agrammatōi*) and ἰδιῶται (*idiōtai*). If we were to translate this literally, they were “unlettered idiots.” The word *agrammatōi* refers to a person whom “one who has not acquired a formal education.”¹¹ The word *idiōtai* refers to “a

⁶ Acts 4:5.

⁷ Acts 4:7.

⁸ Acts 4:8.

⁹ John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13.

¹⁰ See Matthew 10:17-20.

¹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 328.

person who has not acquired ... expertise in some field of knowledge or activity—'layman, ordinary person, amateur.'"¹²

But Peter and John were not speaking like uneducated laymen. They were speaking boldly and with authority. This was unusual. This was uncommon. Where did uncommon men receive such uncommon boldness? Ah! Wait a moment. This council has seen this kind of thing before somewhere. Where was it? Where had they seen this before? Ah yes, now they remembered.

"They recognized that they had been with Jesus." (v.13)

Jesus was an "unlettered layman." Jesus had no formal education in the Torah or Jewish law and yet *"the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught as one with authority, and not as the scribes"* (Mt. 7:28-29). Peter and John were speaking boldly with authority just as Jesus had spoken. They were talking just like their Master. The disciples were conducting themselves in accordance with the attitude and demeanor of the Master.

Boldness concerning the truth comes from being with Jesus. Boldness concerning ultimate truth does not come from formal education that comes from being with great men, but rather the clearheaded, calm wisdom and bold authority that comes from being *with Jesus*. Do not mistake loud-mouth confidence with Christian boldness. Do not mistake stubbornness with Christian boldness. Christian boldness has to do with boldly affirm the truth about Jesus, not loudly asserting your own political opinions. There is a difference.

The Default Position of Opposition (v.14)

Next, notice the natural resistance that comes against the authority of Jesus. The **default position of mankind to the authority of Jesus is one of opposition rather than acceptance**. Look at how the religious officials and ruling council respond to the truth declared by Peter and John.

But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. Acts 4:14 (ESV)

Standing before them was living proof of the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth and yet their default position was one of opposition rather than acceptance. The human authorities of the day, in stead of rejoicing that a man born lame was **standing** before them, they are looking for a way to oppose this miracle. That is insanity. That is sin. Sin is insanity.

¹² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 328.

Notice that convincing evidence was not lacking. There was *undeniable evidence standing directly in front of them and still they were not convinced*. Since every human being is a sinner, this is the natural condition of every human being on the planet. All of us instinctively want to reject all and any authority over us. Since the highest authority is God, He receives the most vehement opposition. Even when good things are being done right before our eyes, we are so spiritually blind in our sin that we look for ways to oppose it. This is proof positive that salvation apart from the inner working of the Holy Spirit is impossible.

The Conference of the Council (v.15-18)

Since opposition to this miracle standing before them was not so easily discerned, they called for a team huddle.

¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:15-18 (ESV)

The opposition to the kind healing and good health of a poor lame, beggar is astonishing. They "*cannot deny*" that a wonderful thing has been happen, but they are certainly seeking to do so! They would if they could. So they conference together, asking themselves, "What are we to do?" These men are not blind. They confess that a "*notable sign has been performed.*" But they do not bother to contemplate together that to which the sign is pointing. Instead, they conspire to stop the sign from pointing any further.

"In oder that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." (v.17)

"This name" is so repugnant that they can't even bring themselves to say it. The name, of course, is the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the name that brought eternal life and present health to this hopeless man. Who knew that **#StoptheSpread** was a first century response to Jesus before it was a twenty-first century response to COVID-19? They were thinking, "Since we can't deny the power of the name of Jesus, but perhaps we can stop it from spreading. Let's tell them not "*to speak no more to anyone in this name.*"

This is the desire of all who oppose God and the good that comes through faith in the name of Jesus. "Just stop talking about the name of Jesus. Stop teaching about Jesus and stop speaking about Jesus. Please be silent about his name." This impulse comes from the enemy of all righteousness, who is Satan and the devil.¹³ Almost no one is aware of this, but it is the

¹³ Revelation 12:9; 20:2.

truth. These leaders did not see themselves as doing the will of the devil, but this is exactly what they were doing (see John 8:42-44). The apostles were going about doing good in the name of Jesus, but the sons of the devil were seeking to oppose that good and silence that name. So the council called them back in before the whole court and publicly “**charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.**” This was a direct, legal command. This represented a formal conclusion of the court and would serve as grounds for any further future action.

The apostles offer a very clear response.

Whom Shall We Obey (v.19-20)

The question is, whom are they to obey?

¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:19-20 (ESV)

Notice first of all the perspective of Peter and John. Their response is shaped by an understanding that first and foremost they live their lives “**in the sight of God.**” God is watching over their lives. It is before the face of God that the events of their lives are unfolding and thus they first seek to do what is right in the sight of God. God is uppermost in their minds. Their highest obedience and deepest allegiance is to God, not man. Thus, they offer their response.

God has spoken concerning this issue before them. What these religious rulers were commanding was in direct opposition to what God had commanded them through Jesus. These rulers were commanding them not to speak in the name of Jesus, while Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize and teach in his name among all nations.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV)

The authority of Jesus is higher than all authority in heaven and on earth, thus whom should be obeyed? The heavenly One with greater authority or the earthly ones with lesser authority? Clearly it is right to obey the one with the higher authority when the commands of those with lesser authority conflict. Jesus commanded his people to speak and teach in his name among all nations, thus the council’s command to stop speaking in Jesus’ name is not binding upon the followers of Jesus, since Jesus possesses the higher authority. Thus, it is right to obey God rather than men when the commands of God conflict with the commands of men.

Besides, as Peter and John explained, “*we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.*” They were simply talking about the events that had happened all around them, real events of which they had been eye witnesses. They were not making up lies. They were simply telling people about real events which Jesus had done among them. “We cannot fail to speak about these things,” they reported.

The council retorted with “*further threats.*” Meaning that they ensured them that there would be painful consequences for them if they refused the council’s command. Maybe they threatened them with fines, beating, or imprisonment. However, these threats did not dissuade the apostles, for “*all were praising God for what had happened.*”

Peter and John were not going to be silent about the sweet action of Jesus in healing a 40+ year old man. These disciples of Jesus had seen too much of the power and presence of Jesus of Nazareth to ever be silent about his name. In his name was life and freedom. In his name was joy and goodness, healing and happiness. In his name was eternal life, which was of far greater value than anything this temporal world had to offer.

Conclusion

So, what have we seen and heard?

First, we have seen and heard that ***boldness comes from being near Jesus.*** Being bold about the truth comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth. The truth that every Christian should boldly proclaim is that there is salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus of Nazareth, for his name and his name alone is the only name under heaven given to mankind by which salvation can be found. This is true for all peoples and all nations. This is the good news that the apostles refused to be silent about. Therefore, neither can we.

Secondly, we have seen and heard that ***the default position of unbelievers is one of opposition to the name of Jesus.*** People who do not know God the Father or his only Son, Jesus, are reflexively opposed to him. Even when they see that good that Christians do, they nevertheless are opposed to the name of Jesus. **Samaritan’s Purse** set up a mobile field hospital in New York to help deal with massive number of people struggling with Coronavirus and yet New York said to them “We don’t want you here.”¹⁴ Thus, no Christian should be surprised when, because of the name of Jesus, we are rejected rather than welcomed. Christians should not be surprised when we discover that the opposition will only intensify over time. The response to the name of Jesus, if it is not reception, will only be “further threats.” The opposition to the name of Jesus will only intensify and grow and deepen the closer we get to the end of time and the return of Christ. Persecution of the Christians will only get worse.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/controversial-central-park-field-hospital-to-close-samaritans-purse-staffers-will-stay-at-mount-sinai/2399596/> accessed 16 January 2021.

Be prepared for it. Do not be surprised by it. Christians cannot be silent concerning the name of Jesus even though the world will demand it.

Third, we have seen and heard that ***there is a great need of healing and that healing comes through the name of Jesus.*** Peter and John most likely walked passed by this lame man every time they went to the temple, but they overlooked him. They had done this for years, possibly even decades. But suddenly, by the movement of the Holy Spirit, one day they stopped and looked at him in the eyes and were led by the Spirit to heal this poor man.

This man was laid there at the gate of the temple by his friends, every day for years, but one day healing came. Suddenly for some reason the Spirit of God caused Peter and John to stop and take notice of this man's pain and then moved them to them to pray for him, and through their prayers, brought healing to him which then led all the people to praise God!

I believe this is what the Lord is doing regarding the issue of racism in our country. ***We Americans have walked by the issue of racism every day for years and decades and most of us haven't seen it.*** It was there, laying right in front of us, but we just didn't see it. We thought it was gone and done away with decades ago. But it isn't. This past year we saw it and heard it. They year 2020 revealed that the racism America thought was was only in its past, is actually still very much with us in the present. The roots of racism from more than three centuries ago still bears foul fruit in the streets of our cities today.

We all saw it and heard it on May 25 in Minneapolis, MN when we saw Derek Chavin's knee on the neck of George Floyd for eight long and sad minutes until his life was snuffed out. I do not pretend to know nor will I venture to guess what was going on in the heart and mind of officer Chavin, but one thing is clear, he showed absolutely no concern for the life of George Floyd as the man 16 times cried out, "I can't breathe." (We saw and heard these exact same words, which became the final words of Eric Garner on July 17, 2014 in Staten Island, NY.)

What I also saw and heard this past year is that when black and brown people watched and heard the video of George Floyd, they thought different thoughts than did white people. I had conversations with two black men who said the same thing. They both told me that when they watched the video of George Floyd, their first thought was, "That could have been me." I spoke with one black mother who told me that when she saw it that video her first thought was, "That could have been my son." When I watched that tragic video my first thought was not, "That could be me." I did not immediately see myself under the knee of a police officer. My first thought was not to personalize what I was seeing.

Why is that? Why do we think such different thoughts?

Because racism and being treated differently because of the color of my skin is not a reality that I daily live with, while for many black people it is.

What I have seen and heard over the past year has reminded me that racism is still a sin that needs to be addressed. Yes, this country has come a long way in dealing with racism, but there is still a long way to go. For many Americans the sin of racism still remains lodged in the heart.

Thus, is good and right that we honor those who have stood against the sin of racism. This past Friday was the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tomorrow is a national holiday to honor him and his work in non-violently fighting against racism.

In fact, he gave his life trying to expose and bring an end to the sin of racism. Dr. King was assassinated on 4 April 1968 (about seven months before I was born). He was only 39 years old and his four children were 13, 11, 7, and 5 years old.

He was not a perfect man. No man is. However, laying aside his moral failures and this theological wobbles, most certainly no one else has done more or paid more dearly in order to advance the cause of racial equality than he did.



King said this in his final sermon¹⁵ the evening before he was assassinated,

The world is all messed up and the nation is sick. Trouble is in the land and confusion is all around. I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period to see what is unfolding...

We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying... We are saying that we are God's children. We don't have to live like we are forced to live.

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles. We don't need any Molotov cocktails.

Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. [Like the Good Samaritan on the road to Jericho.] So the first question that the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked, was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the

¹⁵ Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKWCxKq0i1k> accessed 16 January 2021.

Good Samaritan came by and he reversed the question. "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness, let us stand with a greater determination, and let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge, to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation...

Then I got into Memphis and some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out, what would happen to me, from some of our sick white brothers. Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop, and I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will, and He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. I've looked over and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised Land!

So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!¹⁶

We honor the work and works of Martin Luther King Jr. who could not but speak of what he had seen and heard. Christian, we too must not fail to speak of what we have seen and heard.

What have we seen and heard?

There is an uncommon God who uses common folk to do uncommon things. God is the kind of God who effects uncommon outcomes by the use of common folk. Let your faith rest solidly in an uncommon God rather than in your common self. If you want to do good for all God's children here on earth, then draw near to the Jesus found in the Bible. Stay near him. Abide in him and let his word abide in you, and he will guide you as to when and how to be bold for the sake of his great name.

If you truly desire to be an instrument of healing in this broken world today, then you must spend more time in God's book than you do in man's Facebook. If you want to alleviate racial injustice, then get your theology from the Bible rather from Twitter, Instagram, or the News. If you can more easily quote news headlines than you can the Holy Scripture, then your priorities need some realignment.

¹⁶ Transcript available here: <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/i-have-been-to-the-mountaintop-speech-transcript-martin-luther-king-jr> accessed 16 January 2021.

If you truly want to be an instrument of God in bringing hope and healing to this world, then you must speak about Jesus vastly more than you do about any political party or their preeminent politicians. There is only one name under heaven given among men whereby any healing will happen, whether it be racial, emotional, physical, or spiritual, and that name is the great name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

We Christians cannot be silent about the great name of Jesus. We will never be silent about the sweet name of Almighty Jesus, for He is active in this world. He is today doing great things among the children of men. Therefore, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Father, grant boldness to us your children. Give us unashamed boldness to speak confidently in the mighty name of Jesus. Father, do great and wonderful things among us through the name of Jesus. May we not be surprised at the opposition of those who do not believe in you since they have no hope. Give us loving, self-sacrificing concern for them and let us answer their unjust accusations with love, patience, truth, and gentleness. Give us hearts that love You above all and desire to please you above all men.

Father, make a way for the healing name of Jesus to be exalted in this broken world.

Father, oh how this country needs healing. Oh how we need an outpouring of your Holy Spirit. Oh how we need your salvation. The sin of racism will only grow and fester without the inward transformation of hard, dead, cold stony hearts. The root problem will never be resolved until the hearts of Americans are happily surrendered to you. So long as the autonomous individual is Master, we will only ever be slaves to our own sinful desires. Freedom from all forms of slavery is found only in Jesus. Only those whom the Son sets free are free indeed.

O Father, make a way for the freeing name of Jesus to be exalted in us, through us, and out into the world by us.

In sweet name of Jesus I pray. Amen.