



Ministering in the Name of Jesus Acts 3:1 - 4:31

Introduction

The church had been birthed with a mighty display of power. Sounds from heaven, the apostles speaking in foreign tongues, and Peter's first sermon had drawn three thousand souls to faith in Christ. From the beginning, the church was vital, growing, and a great witness to those in Jerusalem. Luke wrote in Acts 2:43 that people were filled with fear as they saw signs and wonders done through the apostles. Chapter three records a description of one such sign and wonder — the healing of a forty-year-old man who had been lame from birth. Here we witness Peter and John, two of Jesus' apostles, ministering in His name. We see how faith in the name of Jesus changes lives!

There were obviously many other miracles accomplished through the apostles, but this is the one which led to the first persecution of believers by the Jewish religious leaders. Chapter four describes the arrest of Peter and John and shows that the Word of God continued to prevail even though the preachers were persecuted. In these passages, we begin to see what these men were really made of and what a significant role the Holy Spirit plays in their lives.

Outline of Acts 3:1 - 4:31

- I. The Power of God - 3:1-26
- II. Persecution by the Rulers - 4:1-22
- III. Prayer of the Believers - 4:23-31

I. The Power of God - 3:1-26

Peter, the outspoken apostle, and John, *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 21:20), were on their way to the temple around 3:00 p.m. for the time of prayer which accompanied the last sacrifices of the day. Little did they know the surprise which was in store for them.

A. Miracle of healing - Acts 3:1-10

1. Peter and John confronted by a lame man - 3:1-3

The man who confronted the two apostles was over forty years old (Acts 4:22) and had been lame from birth. His condition seemed hopeless. Being unable to work to support himself, all he could do was beg. He had been carried up to the temple every day for years and laid at the Beautiful Gate (an entrance on the east side of the temple) where he sought charity from people on their

way to make a sacrifice, worship, or pray. As Peter and John were about to enter the temple, the lame man called out to them.

2. Peter's response - 3:4-7a

Peter and John did not look away as some do when they see a beggar. They looked the man in the eyes and told him, *Look at us*. Expecting to receive *something*, the lame man gave them his full attention. How awestruck he must have been when Peter told him that they had no money but would give him something else — a cure. Peter told him to stand up and walk *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. It was the power and authority of Jesus which would heal, and not Peter. Peter was only the instrument of the healing as he took the man by the hand and lifted him up.

3. Result of the healing - 3:7b-10

Luke tells us that *immediately* the man's feet and ankle bones were strengthened so that he was able to do five things he had never been able to do before. He was able to leap up, to stand, to walk, to enter the temple, and to praise God as a whole and healthy man. He did these things with such exuberance that he drew the attention of all the people in the temple. They recognized him as being the beggar from the Beautiful Gate, and they were filled with wonder and amazement.

As a believer, your life and your witness should fill others with wonder and amazement. Will you allow Him to work His power in your life? Will you stand for Him, and walk for Him, and praise His name? Will you let everyone know what He has done for you?

B. Preaching of Peter - Acts 3:11-26

The lame man stayed with Peter and John as they entered Solomon's porch, a covered colonnade on the east side of the temple where Jesus had sometimes taught (John 10:23). The amazement which filled the crowd drew them to the three men. Peter took this opportunity to preach the gospel. His sermon verified that the lame man was healed through faith in Jesus. Peter took no credit for the miracle.

1. The questions - 3:12

Peter began by addressing the crowd as *men of Israel* and by asking them two questions. He asked why they were so amazed at what had happened and, why they

looked at John and himself as if they had done the miracle by their own power or godliness. The lame man had been healed in the name of Jesus and he surely recognized the power which had worked the miracle. After all, he did not praise Peter and John but God.

2. The accusation - 3:13-15

The *men of Israel* who had witnessed the miracle needed to know how it had actually occurred. Peter introduced Jesus as the Servant of God. From Isaiah 42:1, 49:6-7, and 53:11, it is clear that the Servant is the Messiah, God's chosen Servant for accomplishing the work of salvation. Peter also called Jesus the Holy One and the Just, titles which were used to refer to God in the Old Testament, thus claiming Christ's deity. Finally, Peter referred to Him as the Prince of Life whom they had *delivered up* and *denied in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let Him go*. It was the Prince of Life they condemned when they had asked for a murderer to go free (as in Luke 23:17-19). Marvin R. Vincent in Word Studies in the New Testament calls this the *magnificent antithesis*: they had asked for a murderer, but killed the Prince of Life.

On the other hand, the God of the *men of Israel*, who was the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had raised Jesus from the dead and glorified Him.

3. Revelation - 3:16

The miracle had occurred through the name of Jesus. The name of Jesus had awakened faith in the lame man, and his faith in Jesus had brought the healing.

4. Call to repentance - 3:17-26

Peter had just leveled a lethal blow to his audience. They had not only murdered the One responsible for the miracle which they had witnessed, they had murdered their Messiah.

a. To the brethren - 3:17-18

But now Peter softened the blow by calling them his *brethren*. He realized that they and their rulers had done the terrible deed *in ignorance*. Furthermore, the suffering and death of Christ (the Messiah) had been foretold by the prophets (see Psalm 22; Isaiah 50:6; 53:5; Daniel 9:26; Luke 24:25-26; John 13:18) and had to be fulfilled.

b. For a second chance - 3:19-21

Peter's listeners had not recognized Jesus as their Messiah, but now they were given another chance. Peter called them to *repent....and be converted*. They now had the opportunity to turn from their sin and turn

to God. They had the opportunity to reverse their judgment about Jesus and confess Him as the Messiah. The result would be forgiveness of sins and great blessings from God.

c. For a prophesied blessing - 3:22-26

God had sent Jesus to bless His people, and Peter's listeners were those people. Peter showed that the blessing of Christ had been prophesied since Moses. In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Moses had promised that God would raise up a Prophet like Himself and that the people were to listen and obey Him or be *utterly destroyed*. The prophecies of Christ had been a common theme of the prophets from Samuel on. Those prophecies were for these *men of Israel*. They were the *sons of the prophets*! They were heirs of the covenant God had made with Abraham in Genesis 22:18, that in his *seed*, namely in Jesus Christ, all the families of the earth would be blessed. The Messianic promises were a blessing from God to them *first* (3:26) and then those blessings were to extend through them to all people.

II. Persecution by the Rulers - Acts 4:1-22

The crowds around Peter and John had attracted the attention of the Jewish rulers. Chapter four shows the first open opposition to the apostles' teaching.

A. Peter and John arrested - 4:1-4

Those who came to arrest them were the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees.

1. Rulers disturbed - 4:1-2

They were thoroughly disturbed because Peter and John were teaching and preaching that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. The Sadducees, very influential members of the priesthood, denied the bodily resurrection of the dead. No wonder they were disturbed by Peter's preaching that God had raised Christ from the dead (3:15).

NOTE: There were two main religious parties which existed in Jerusalem at this time — the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In Luke's gospel, the Pharisees were the most intense opponents of Christ because He laid bare their hypocrisies and was a threat to their authority. In Acts, the Sadducees are the opposing force against the apostles because the teaching of Jesus' resurrection was a threat to their beliefs and power.

2. Apostles held in custody - 4:3

The temple sacrifices were concluded and the temple gates were closed. No more official action could be taken that day, so Peter and John were held in custody until the next day.

3. People believed - 4:4

In spite of the opposition and arrest, the church continued to grow. Many of those who had heard Peter's sermon believed, bringing the total number of converts to 5,000.

B. Peter's address to the Sanhedrin - 4:5-12

The very next day the apostles were taken before the Sanhedrin, which may be likened to a Jewish Supreme Court. It was the same group of learned and powerful men who had recently judged Jesus. It consisted of 71 members of the priesthood (the *rulers, elders, and scribes.....John and Alexander* [4:5-6], probably members of the high priest's family, and the high priest.) Luke names Annas as the high priest, but Caiaphas had been high priest since the Romans had deposed his father-in-law, Annas, in A.D. 15. Annas was probably still the power behind the office and still recognized as high priest by many of the Jews since the office was supposed to be held for life.

1. The question of the court - 4: 5-7

By what power or by what name have you done this? In other words, where did these two men get their authority to do what they had done? In the Greek, the order of words places the emphasis on *you*, turning it into a contemptuous question.

2. Spirit-filled response - 4:8-12

Jesus had promised His apostles that they would be arrested and questioned. He had also promised that at those times, the Holy Spirit would give them the proper words to speak (Mark 13:11). That promise was now fulfilled as the Holy Spirit *filled* Peter. The apostles had been baptized with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and that meant that the Holy Spirit indwelt them and would never leave them. The filling of the Holy Spirit at this time was an endowment of special strength and power for the moment at hand. (All believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion [1 Corinthians 12:13]. It is something which occurs only once in the life of a believer. But Christians are also commanded to be *filled* with the Spirit [Ephesians 5:18]. Every Christian has all of the Spirit, but each Christian is commanded to let the Spirit have all of him or her in order to live under the Spirit's control. The filling of the Spirit gives special strength for living the Christian life and serving God.) In this instance, Peter was *filled with the Holy Spirit* (totally controlled by the Holy Spirit) in order to speak with power and wisdom to his opponents.

- a. The man was healed by the name of Jesus
- 4:8-10

Peter answered the question directly. He and John had done a *good deed* in healing the helpless man and it had been done *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth* whom they (the Jews, especially those of the Sanhedrin to whom he spoke) had crucified and whom God had raised from the dead.

- b. Salvation comes only by the name of
Jesus - 4:11-12

Peter was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and in defending himself, he took the opportunity to preach the gospel to the Jewish rulers. He quoted Psalm 118:22 to show that God, in raising Christ from the dead, had made *the stone which was rejected by you builders, the chief cornerstone*, the most important stone in the building. Just as the name of Jesus was the lame man's only hope for healing, the name of Jesus is the only hope for spiritual healing. None of us — not Peter's listeners, not anyone reading these lessons, nor anyone anywhere anytime can find salvation in any other but Jesus Christ. Have you repented of your sin and found salvation in Him? If you are not sure, would you ask your discussion leader for a Confidence Letter which will explain how you can be sure that salvation is yours!

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the prosecutors had become the defendants. They were put on the spot! Jesus had told His apostles that they would be given words and wisdom which their adversaries would not be able to contradict (Luke 21:15). That is exactly what happened.

C. Verdict - Acts 4:13-22

The Sanhedrin had to render their decision.

1. The revelation - 4:13

Peter and John were *uneducated and untrained men*, meaning that they were simply laymen. They had not received rabbinical training and had no authority to teach. However, they spoke with such boldness! The men of the council remembered how Jesus had amazed them with His teaching (Mark 1:22; Luke 2:46-47; John 7:15) and realized that these men must have been His followers.

Those who have been with Jesus should manifest it to the world. If you have spent time with Him, it should be evident to everyone with whom you come in contact.

2. The conference - 4:14 -16

Peter and John were sent out of the council chambers so the rulers could confer among themselves. They could not deny that the lame man had been healed because he was standing right in front of them. They

could not deny that it was a *good deed* as Peter had said. They could not deny that it was a miracle because the lame man was over forty years old and all the people were well acquainted with this beggar whom they used to see every day at the Beautiful Gate. Everyone had witnessed the miracle.

3. The resolution - 4:17

The council resolved to do two things. They could not punish the apostles because of the obvious miracle they had performed and because of their popularity with the people. Therefore, they would threaten them severely and order them not to speak to anyone about the name of Jesus.

4. The command - 4:18-20

Peter and John were called back into the council chambers and ordered *not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*. Matthew Henry, in his Commentary, observes: *They had not the confidence to deny it, but, in the silliest and most sneaking manner imaginable, bade the apostles not to tell anybody of it.*

As for the two apostles, *When required to choose between the will of God and the decree of men, they had no choice but to obey God* (The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Moody Press). The Sanhedrin had refused to uphold the authority of God, so duty to God took precedence over the commands of the Sanhedrin. Whether or not Peter and John spoke about it anymore, surely the miraculous healing and Peter's sermon were the hot topic of conversation throughout Jerusalem. The apostles were compelled to speak about the things they had seen and heard. Anyone who has experienced a miracle must do likewise.

5. The threat - 4:21-22

The people had witnessed a miracle. They had seen the power of Christ. They had seen proof of who He was, and they were glorifying God. In such an atmosphere, the Sanhedrin could do nothing but threaten the apostles and release them.

III. Prayer of the Believers - Acts 4:23-31

Peter and John returned to their friends and told them all that had happened in the council chambers. Then, *with one accord*, they turned to God in prayer. When you're in trouble or when people are against you, who do you turn to?

A. Praise - Acts 4:23-28

1. For the sovereignty of God - 4:24

The prayer began with praise to God. In the face of opposition, they acknowledged God's sovereign, creative, and controlling power over all things. When things go wrong, do you lament over the power of Satan at work or do you praise God, knowing that His power is supreme? Do you always begin your prayers, as the apostles did, with recognition of God's sovereign authority and power?

2. For the providence of God - 4:25-28

The prayer recognized that God's divine direction is always at work in the world and that the persecution and rejection of Christ had been predicted by God in Psalm 2. Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Berea, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, were *kings of the earth*. They were the *rulers*, actually two enemies, who united together against Christ (Luke 23:12) along with the Gentile *nations* and the *people* of Israel. Nothing, not even the crucifixion of the promised Messiah, God's only Son, happens outside His sovereign will and providence.

B. Petition - Acts 4:29-30

In the light of the persecution they were now facing, their prayer was for boldness to speak God's Word, the supernatural ability to heal, and the power to perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. Notice that they did not pray for their own protection or for God to remove the persecution but for strength and power in the face of it.

C. Preaching the Word - Acts 4:31

As the prayer closed, the meeting place was shaken, perhaps a sign that God had heard their prayer and desired for their faith to be established and unshaken. All who were assembled were filled with the Holy Spirit and went out and preached the word of God with boldness.

Applications

1. To what extent do you surrender your life to the Holy Spirit so He can fill you? What other things in your life might be removed so the Spirit can have more of you?
2. Do you ever pray for boldness in standing up and speaking out for God? Will you pray for that now and then take every opportunity to follow through?
3. When troubles come, do you pray for God to remove them or for strength to be a witness through them to His glory?