



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

Introduction

The church had been born with a mighty display of power. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, manifested in sounds from heaven, the apostles speaking in foreign tongues, and Peter's first sermon, three thousand souls were drawn 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. Ministering in the name of Jesus, Peter and John revealed how faith changes lives!

There were 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. These passages reveal the true character and faith of the apostles and the significance of the Holy Spirit 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.

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

- 1. Confronted by a lame man - 3:1-3

The man who confronted the two apostles was over forty years old (Acts 4:22). He had been lame from birth and his condition seemed hopeless. Being unable to work to support himself, all he could do was beg. Every day for years he had been carried up to the temple and laid at the Beautiful Gate (an entrance on the east side of the temple) where he sought charity from people who were on their way to offer 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 - 3:4-7

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 - 3:7-10

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 the beggar from the Beautiful Gate, and were filled with wonder and amazement.

As a believer, shouldn't your life and witness fill others with wonder and amazement? Will you allow Jesus Christ to work His power in your life? Will you stand for Him, and walk for Him, and praise His name? Will you let others know what He has done for you?

B. Peter's Preaching - 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 and confirm 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. 1.) "*Why do you marvel at this?*" 2.) "*Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?*" The lame man had not been healed by the power of Peter or John. He had been healed '*in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*' (3:6) and he surely

recognized the power which had worked the miracle. After all, the healed man did not praise Peter and John. He praised God (3:8).

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 God's "Servant". Those familiar with Isaiah 42:1, 49:6-7, and 53:11 knew the Servant of which Peter spoke as 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 the people 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."

In stark contrast, God, 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 delivered an overwhelming 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 Peter softened the blow by calling them his "*brethren*". He realized the terrible deed had been done 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. Moses had promised that God would raise up a Prophet like himself (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). He commanded the people to listen and obey Him or be "*utterly destroyed*". The prophecies concerning Christ had been a common theme of the prophets from Samuel forward. Those prophecies were for the people of Israel. They were the "*sons of the prophets*"! They were heirs of the covenant God 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 the Jews first (3:26) and 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 attracted the attention of the Jewish rulers. Chapter four reveals 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 Saducees.

1. Rulers disturbed - 4:1-2

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

NOTE: There were two main religious parties in Jerusalem at this time — the Pharisees and the Saducees. In Luke's gospel, the Pharisees were the most intense opponents of Christ because He laid bare their hypocrisies and threatened their authority. In Acts, the Saducees 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

By the time Peter and John were arrested, the temple sacrifices were concluded and the temple gates were closed. No official action could be taken that day, so the apostles were held in custody.

3. People believed - 4:4

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

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

The next day the apostles were taken before the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court and 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...Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John and Alexander*). John and Alexander were probably members of the high priest's family, and, although Annas is named as the high priest, it was actually his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who had been serving in that position since the Romans had deposed Annas, in A.D. 15. Annas was probably 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 from 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 the word "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 empowered Peter to speak to his opponents with wisdom and authority.

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

In defending himself, Peter 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. Peter and John had heard this same message from Jesus (Luke 20:17-18).

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, please 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 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 be 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 those you meet every day.

2. The conference - 4:14 -16

The rulers sent Peter and John out of the council chambers so they could confer among themselves. They could not deny that the lame man had been healed. He was standing right in front of them! They could not deny that a *good deed* had been done, as Peter had stated. 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 saw 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

which had occurred 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. The apostles were compelled to speak about the things they had seen and heard. Can anyone who has experienced a miracle fail to do the same?

5. The threat - 4:21-22

The people had witnessed a miracle. They had seen the power of Christ. They had heard 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 Perea, and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, were "*kings of the earth*" at that time. 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 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 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 heard their prayer and desired 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 will you take every opportunity to follow through?
3. When troubles come, do you pray for God to remove them or do you pray for strength to be a witness through them to His glory?