

Saturday - Sunday, March 24-25, 2007

When God Has More in Mind

“Confronting the Religious Spirit”

Acts 4:1-31

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The followers of Jesus are facing resistance; resistance to the message they bring and the results of that message.

Jesus told them they would face resistance; if He did they would, so don't be surprised or discouraged by it.

But who likes to be resisted; to have someone or something come against us when we are simply trying to do what we feel we are supposed to.

I have talked to followers of Jesus who are completely exhausted and frustrated by the resistance they are experiencing in just trying to be a Christian. I have also spoken to others facing resistance who are energized and made even more determined in doing what God says.

What about you? Are you facing resistance to following Jesus; when you attempt to share the message of Jesus with others or when you just try to live out what you believe?

No matter where you might be tonight this passage will remind all of us that resistance is normal; to face it does not mean defeat or that we are doing something wrong.

Understanding this will change how we react when facing resistance; resulting in greater impact in helping others to follow Jesus.

(v. 1-2) *The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because **the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.***

When facing resistance ...

1. Stay on MESSAGE. (4:1-4)

In the previous chapter Peter and John had healed a man who had been crippled from birth; as a result a growing number of people were showing greater and greater interest in what the apostles were teaching and who they were teaching about.

This “greatly disturbed” the religious leaders who had heard about this recent healing and who had just arrived at the scene. Why?

The religious leaders enjoyed the influence that came with their position both within Judaism and the society as a whole.

They were concerned that this influence was being threatened because of the message and the ministry of Jesus' followers.

Jesus had described the religious community of His day, especially the leaders, as men who had elevated obedience to rules and regulations over one's relationship with God and obedience to Him.

This kind of person is described in 1Tim. 3:5 as, “(Someone) *having a form of godliness but denying its power.*”

The lifeless teaching of these religious leaders produced frustration, heavy burdens, and a lack of clear direction in people's lives which made them open to the good news being taught by Peter & John.

Why? They stayed on message ... “*The apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.*”

They didn't water it down; try to make it more palatable; give in to peer pressure; get caught up in side issues not central to the good news. (Sadducees – didn't believe in resurrection, political agents)

Look at the results that occurred by staying on message ...

³ *They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ **But** many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.*

Staying on message may at times bring personal discomfort but it will always be used by God in ways that far outweigh the discomfort we might experience.

When facing resistance ...

2. Stay **EMPOWERED**. (4:5-12)

⁵ *The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.* ⁶ *Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family.* ⁷ *They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"*

These words might have a ring of familiarity to a gathering that took place just a few weeks earlier, one described in Mark 14 like this:

"They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. They asked Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" He answered, "I am."

These same men (Annas, Caiaphas) ask Peter and John, "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Really a question about power & authority:

What power – what's the source, where does it come from

What name – who's behind it, who's authority (God or Satan)

Peter's response to their question begins in v. 8:

⁸ *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ [then know this], you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified but Whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone" ¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

Peter is filled by the Spirit so that what he said was directed by God.

Jesus prepared them for this in Luke 12:11-12 when he said, "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

These Spirit inspired words kept the focus upon Jesus:

- ✓ Jesus healed this man, He is the source of the power
- ✓ Jesus is the capstone (it's all about Him not us)
- ✓ Jesus has been given the authority to save/rescue all people

(John 15:26-27) "When the Counselor comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning".

When facing resistance stay empowered by the One who will always help you speak in a way that makes the greatest impact on others.

When facing resistance ...

3. Stay **OBEDIENT**. (4:13-22)

¹³ *When they (religious leaders) saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished [from disturbed to astonished] and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Religious leaders were being influenced by Peter & John. They noticed how courageous these men were in responding to the resistance they were facing. (never underestimate courage)

Then when they factored in that these men had no special training in the seminaries of that day and that they were common men; without any position, popularity or privilege, it says that these leaders went from being "greatly disturbed" in v. 2 to "astonished" 11 verses later.

They had made an important connection; Peter & John had been with Jesus. Maybe there is something to what they are saying; maybe they know something we don't; maybe we were too quick to judge; who was this Jesus?

They find themselves in quite a dilemma. Described in v. 14-16: this man was healed, they couldn't deny it, everyone knew it, it's done but let's do something to stop any future occurrences like this.

¹⁷ *But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.* ¹⁸ *Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.*

No more talking/teaching that communicates that Jesus was anymore than a dead man.

The apostle's response to their command begins in v. 19 ...

¹⁹ *But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.* ²⁰ *For we cannot help speaking about **what we have seen and heard**."* (1 Jn. 1:1-3)

We choose obedience to God over obedience to you!

Our obedience is personal, we've been with Him, we know Him!

²¹ *After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.* ²² *For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.*

When facing resistance keep choosing obedience to God, the One you know and love and the One who knows and loves you!

Finally when facing resistance ...

4. Stay together in FERVENT PRAYER. (4:23-31)

Describe 23-31 (released, reported, praised God, bold requests!)

(29-31) *Now, Lord, consider their threats and **enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness. Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.**" After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.*

Enable us to speak w/greater boldness; do mighty works

When facing resistance pray first; ask God do that which shakes your life and the lives of those around you.

Closing Comments

Prayer

Closing Song