

Acts 4 - John Karmelich

1. One of my favorite expressions about Satan goes as follows:
 - a) "If you don't think the devil is real, try opposing him for awhile!"
 - b) Chapter 4 is about facing the opposition, be it man or a spiritual entity(s).
 - c) Jesus made this *wonderful* promise to us when he was here:
 - i) Quoting Jesus: "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division [emphasis added]. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." (Luke 12:51-53 NIV)
 - ii) Well now, that's encouraging. Jesus is saying that *within our own families*, some will "get it" and some won't.
 - a) There is both the "free-will" to choose (our perspective); and
 - b) God's pre-destiny of those who did and didn't choose (because God knows all things!)
 - d) But what does this have to do with this lesson? Glad you asked!
 - i) Peter has made two sermons in the last 2 chapters.
 - ii) Peter healed a man who has been crippled from birth and was over 40 years old when Peter performed this miracle.
 - iii) So far in the Book of Acts, over 3,000 people have become Christians.
 - e) So what did you expect the Romans, the Jewish Leaders, the world to think?
 - i) "Isn't that neat? You formed a new religion. Good for you!" Hardly!
 - ii) There is little in life *more dangerous* than challenging the "establishment."
 - iii) I remember the great economist, Milton Freedman, once wrote a book called:
 - a) *The Tyranny of the Status Quo*.
 - b) His point is that to *really* change things in an economic system is almost impossible because the powers that be (government, religion, etc.) *have* that power *by* the current system. To change the *system* means people have to give up that power and change their way of thinking.
 - f) I think that is one of the points Jesus was making. His approach to religion, life, and life after death was *radically* different, *exclusive*, and unlike anything on earth.
 - i) To use a popular cliché, Jesus was "upsetting the apple cart."
 - g) The growth of Christianity was and is a threat to government, to religious systems, and well, "the status quo." We'll see that as we go along in this lesson.
2. But there is one more thing that is important to understand. There are evil spiritual forces *behind* these attacks.
 - a) One of the brilliant things that God did was put Satan on a "time clock".
 - i) In the last lesson I talked about that there is a "fixed" number of believers who become Christians, and then God says, in effect, "okay, that's a wrap."
 - a) (See last week's lesson and/or Romans 11:25 for details.)
 - b) If you think about it logically heaven has a fixed number of people not an infinite number. That's why I say Satan's on a "time clock".
 - ii) I call this method brilliant because:
 - a) It keeps Satan on his toes. He knows he has a limited time on earth. But he doesn't know the *exact* number. Therefore, his #1 priority is to keep people from *becoming* Christians. This is why he attacks Christians *after* they become believers: primarily, to stop/slow down the growth.

- b) It is also brilliant because it keeps *us* "on our toes." I don't know about you, but I've seen enough of this sinful world, and I *yearn* for Jesus to bring on the millennial kingdom. What do you think "thy kingdom come" refers to? Therefore, this method keeps Christians active in evangelizing to bring in that final person!
 - b) Okay, so now we know that attacks on the growth of Christianity come out of both human desires and evil spiritual desires. What is our solution? Do we outfox them? Come up with better marketing strategies? Choke people until they accept Jesus? No!
 - i) If you study this chapter, you'll see the answer is prayer!
 - ii) The disciples started off as 11 guys. They were opposed for hundreds of years by the Roman Empire (a death sentence for Christians), their religious establishment and, let's face it, demonic attacks. Their *primary* weapon?
 - a) Prayer!
 - b) You'll see it in this chapter, and as a pattern in the Bible.
 - iii) If you study Ephesians Chapter 6, there is a "checklist" for going into *spiritual* battle against our enemies. The *only offensive weapon* on the list is *prayer*!
- 3. It is important to remember where we left off last time. The chapters and verse numbers are not part of the original text, and were added centuries later. In Chapter 3, Peter and John, on the way to the temple, healed a 40+ year old crippled man who had been that way since birth.
- 4. Chapter 4, Verse 1: 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. 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.
 - a) Notice that there were 3 groups of people here.
 - i) The apostles;
 - ii) The people they were speaking to; and
 - iii) The captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees.
 - b) Look what's happening here. Peter was preaching a *very* successful sermon.
 - i) People were coming to Jesus.
 - ii) In those "male-bias" times, the male believers were up to 5,000.
 - a) You can probably double that if you count women and children.
 - c) Let's talk a little about the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees.
 - i) The captain of the temple guard was probably the 2nd most powerful person in the Jewish religious system, next to the High Priest himself.
 - ii) He was given authority by the High Priest and the Romans to arrest anybody not complying with the rules. He had his own police at his calling.
 - iii) The Sadducees were a "political group" among the religious Jews.
 - a) Today, they would be called the liberal religious believers.
 - b) They preached the ethical parts of the Bible, but did not believe in any of the spiritual stuff. They didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, angels, and other spiritual matters. What was important to them was that "we all try to get along and be nice to each other". (My comment.)
 - c) The opposition to the Sadducees were the Pharisees.
 - (1) The Pharisees were the ones who took the Old Testament *seriously*. Modern Orthodox Judaism is based on the teachings of the Pharisees.
 - d) At the time of Acts, the Sadducees were the majority in power.

- d) I don't know if this is significant or not, but in the entire Book of Acts, you never read of a Sadducee *ever* becoming a Christian. Some of the Pharisees did (Acts 15:5). It makes you wonder if it is easier to convert people who take the Bible *literally* (as the Pharisees did) than those who *spiritualize* most of the Bible (like the Sadducees).
 - e) Back to the text. Peter and John were thrown into jail overnight for this act.
 - i) I might be thinking, oh great. I make a cripple guy better, teach people about Jesus, and my reward is to be thrown in jail? Gee thanks God!
 - ii) If we study the patterns of Peter, this is not the case. He probably spent the evening in prayer, wondering what he was going to say the next day, at his hearing.
 - iii) The sad truth is *today*, many Christians around the world are in *jail* for doing just that. Preaching Jesus rising from the dead, and yes, performing miracles in His name.
There are estimates that more Christians have died in the last hundred years because of religious persecution than any time in church history! It is *essential* to pray for the persecuted church. One can google the "top 10 countries" that persecute or are the least tolerant to Christians. Pray through that list! I can name countries that outlawed the bible and now accept it as God's word!
 - f) Notice also that Peter preached Jesus rising from the dead.
 - i) As I stated last week, many people can talk about "Jesus the great teacher." The Muslims believe Jesus was a great prophet, of Jesus, the miracle worker. But the *risen* Jesus is another matter! That would be acknowledging Jesus as God. No other religion in the history of mankind has *ever* taught this!
 - g) Back to Peter and John in jail. Notice verse 4 again: "But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand."
 - i) With Peter and John in jail, they may not have even been *aware* of the success they had that evening. They probably thought they were in trouble (death sentence?) for what they did. Often, God does not even make us *aware* of our own successes as we witness for Him.
5. Verse 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?"
- a) By "coincidence" the next day happened to be one of the regular meetings of the "Sanhedrin." This was the ruling body of Jewish leaders (as permitted under the Romans). There were 70 elected members, except the high-priest, who was included with the 70. Annas was a direct descendant of Aaron and the high priest. Annas is the deciding vote in case there's a tie!
 - b) A little about Annas, and these guys Caiaphas, John, and Alexander.
 - i) A historian named Josephus taught us a little about their background.
 - ii) Annas was the *recognized* as high priest by the people. But since the Romans were in charge, they changed the high priests every so often. It turns out there was a lot of corruption, and it was mostly Annas' sons, son-in-law, etc. who took turns being the high priest. Caiaphas, John, and Alexander were probably among this family unit. I'll just say history isn't kind in describing this family!
 - c) The first question they asked was, "by what power or what name did you do this?"
 - i) Actually, it's a fair question. The Jews understood that there was demonic power capable of miracles. The question was, by who's *authority* did you do this? In their mind, this could only be done in the name of either the "true God" or "false gods" (i.e. demonic).

6. Peter recognized an opportunity when he saw one. Verse 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...."
- a) Put yourself in Peter's shoes for the moment. He spent the night in a dark jail cell with John. He probably spent most of the night in prayer, wondering what he was going to say today. His desire was probably to see members of the ruling body convert to Christianity. I'm sure he prayed that their eyes and hearts be opened.
 - i) The fact that *none* of them converted to Christianity (as far we know) tells of the hardness of their heart, and it also tells of the sovereignty of God. God answers *all* of our prayers. Sometimes, the answer is "no."
- b) Remember from last time, the importance of a "name" in Jewish culture. A name is associated with a person, much in the same way we might associate a person's name with their reputation, i.e. "their good name." The best example I read about was when one signs a check, you are saying "my name is good for that amount."
- c) Like Peter's last sermon, Peter "goes for the guilt." That's important in witnessing. People need to realize they are a sinner and *need* a savior prior to repentance.
 - i) This is why Peter emphasizes the Jesus "whom you crucified."
 - ii) I don't believe the Jews are guilty of 1st degree murder. They are guilty of *rejecting* Jesus, and that is what Peter is implying here. I talked about this in more detail over the past few lessons.
- d) Peter puts a big emphasis on "God raised Him from the dead."
 - i) Peter was speaking to Sadducees. Again they're the liberals of that day. This group did not believe in a literal resurrection. How do I know this? Acts 23:
 - a) "(The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)" (Acts 23:8 NIV)
- e) It is interesting to note that the presence of a visible miracle is *not enough to convert people*. Many people think and pray, oh, if only God would send this person a great miracle, *then* they would believe! Wrong!
 - i) Here were these guys *staring* at someone who was crippled from birth and is now healed.
 - ii) Jesus *raised people from the dead* and yet people didn't believe.
 - a) Quoting Jesus: "'He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:31 NIV)
 - iii) Why is that? Why aren't miracles enough?
 - a) People don't want to change their ways. Believing in Jesus means changing their lifestyle and repenting of their sins. Deep down, a lot of people don't want to change, even if it becomes obvious to them that Christianity is the truth.
 - b) People can become so engrained in their religious systems or their lifestyles, that it is almost *impossible* for them to change. This is why prayer is our greatest hope in reaching people, not visible signs.
 - c) The counter-point is some people are *dramatically* affected by miracles. Many were converted *because* of this crippled being healed. The point I'm making is that not *all* people change just because of a miracle.

- f) Peter continues. In order to make his point that the Old Testament scriptures predicted that Jewish leaders would reject the Messiah, Peter turns to a quote from Psalms 118:22 that he associates with the coming Messiah.
7. Verse 11, Peter quoting Psalms: Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."
- Peter twists the Psalm quote a little to personalize it. In Psalms, it reads as follows:
 - "The stone *the* [emphasis added] builders rejected has become the cornerstone;" (Psalm 118:22 NIV).
 - Peter's version: "the stone *you* [emphasis added] builders rejected,..."
 - I'm not accusing Peter of "twisting the Scriptures"; only pointing out that Peter believed the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish nation was the *fulfillment* of this prediction in Psalm 118, Verse 22.
 - The historian Josephus records that when the temple was built by Solomon, they temporarily lost the cornerstone (a.k.a. "capstone") of the temple. The stones were not quarried at the site of the temple, but imported. When the cornerstone was brought in, they didn't know what it was, and it was tossed in a quarry until they realized it was the "main" stone. That was the immediate fulfillment of that scripture.
 - Prophecy often has a double fulfillment. God often has short-term and long-term fulfillment of the same prediction. Why? The short-term fulfillment is to validate the speaker *as* speaking from God. The long-term fulfillment is often the *main* intention of the prediction. "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev 19:10b, NIV)
8. The next verse is the most important verse in this chapter. (That means pay attention! ☺)
Verse 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.
- Wow. Stop and meditate on that one. Memorize it.
 - This verse preaches that the *only* way to heaven is through Jesus Christ. It is one of several verses in the Bible that preach Jesus is the *only* way.
 - A few others for your memory studies:
 - Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6 NIV)
 - Paul said: "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.'" (Romans 14:10b-11, NKJV)
 - Whether you like it or not Christianity is exclusive. Jesus teaches that he is the "truth".
 - One of the things "casual" Christians or liberal theologians will argue is, well, I believe in Jesus, but I don't believe it's the only way to heaven.
 - What they are saying is, it wasn't necessary for Jesus to die on the cross. There are other ways to get into heaven. Obviously God judges people fairly based on what they do know when they die. What they are *further* saying is that it is possible to get into heaven by being "good enough." Nonsense!
 - I'm convinced it is a matter of pride/ego. People want to believe that it is possible to be saved just by being a good person. It is a way of justifying their own lifestyle. It is a belief in "relativism." That is, I'm "relatively" better than the next person; therefore, I (or whoever) deserve to be saved.
 - The problem with relativism is that you *never* know what is "good enough" to be saved. With Christianity, you *know* what it takes to be saved: The belief in Jesus dying for your sins, and your commitment to following Him. You *know* you are saved. This is why the *assurance* of Christianity is called the "good news." "Relativity" and "never knowing for sure" are not necessary!

9. Okay, back to the story. Here is the reaction of the Jewish council to Peter's little sermon. Verse 13: When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.
- a) If it weren't so sad, it would be comical. Think about what they *didn't say*.
 - i) They didn't comment on Peter's speech or his statement about Jesus' resurrection. Their hearts were not penetrable on this issue!
 - b) All they could think of was where did these guys learn this stuff? The disciples didn't graduate from their seminaries! They didn't study under us. How can they preach this? Oh, I know, Jesus taught it to them. That explains it.
 - i) As I said earlier in my message, people can become so engrained in their own beliefs, it is not *possible* for them to consider the message.
 - ii) All they wanted was a "logical" explanation for what happened *without having to change their belief systems!*
 - iii) People do that today. They look for "logical" explanations of miracles. They explain how it was just "mental psychological beliefs" that made them better. The power of faith "psychologically." Nonsense! People deny the power of God *simply because they don't want to change their lives. Pure and simple!*
10. Verse 15: So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶ "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. 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."
- a) These guys were like Pontius Pilate, "the bureaucrat." Pilate tried to get out of the "Jesus mess" without getting himself in trouble. If you study the Gospels, Pilate did everything in his power to try to compromise with the Jewish leaders, as he figured out Jesus was being framed. Like Pilate, no one is *allowed* to take a neutral stand with Jesus. Either you are for him or against him.
 - i) This is a similar situation. They obviously saw the miracle of the healed man. The reason they brought the healed man to the trial was probably so that he might say something contradictory to the testimony of Peter and John.
 - ii) These guys were the *power* of the Jewish religious system. The "status quo."
 - b) They couldn't deny the miracle without starting a riot. They couldn't accept Peter and John's testimony without losing their power and their beliefs. What could they do to not lose their power and not start a riot? Simple. Tell these guys to shut up!
 - c) There are a lot of people like this today.
 - i) Here are some typical comments: "Hey, it's okay if you believe in Jesus, just don't go spreading it around to other people"; and "Why make such a big deal about it?"; or "You can believe what you want, just keep it to yourselves!"
 - ii) Other places it is much worse. It is a crime in Saudi Arabia to wear a cross. Missionaries are killed for preaching Jesus. In many countries, preaching of Christianity is a death sentence.
 - d) The "status quo" can apply to the Christian religion as well. I've talked to a few missionaries around the world who claim their biggest opposition to preaching the gospel comes from the church itself. Some missionaries will complain that the greatest resistance will come from the Catholic Church, or the established Orthodox church in those countries. It is understandable that there are differences in interpretation between Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox viewpoints, but to actually *resist* preaching the Gospel because of those viewpoints is hindering the work of the Gospel! Period.

11. So the council called in Peter and John for their decision. Verse 18: Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.
 - a) And Peter and John replied: "You know, we have to respect our Jewish leaders. After all, they're wise men who study the scriptures. It is important to respect our leaders."
 - b) I'm kidding of course, but I'm making a point.
12. Verse 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."
 - a) It is a whole sermon unto itself about disobeying authority.
 - i) Romans Chapter 13 makes it *very* clear Christians are to obey local authorities.
 - ii) "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." (Romans 13:1 NIV)
 - b) Sometimes, it is necessary to disobey authorities. I call it "higher law."
 - i) The first biblical example that came to mind is the midwives in the Book of Exodus. The midwives were told by Pharaoh to kill the male-born children. These midwives lied to Pharaoh and disobeyed this order. (Exodus, Chapter 1, versus 19-20)
 - ii) In the book of Joshua, Rahab the harlot lied to the local authorities in Jericho about the Jewish scouts sent to spy out the land. (Joshua 2:3-5).
 - iii) Today, people smuggle Bibles into countries where they are not allowed. They preach the Gospel in places where it is expressly forbidden.
 - a) There are times when it is necessary to disobey civil laws. Usually it is an obvious contradiction to preaching the Gospel or one of the Ten Commandments.
 - iv) Notice that Jesus and the disciples *never* used the principal of "higher law" to not pay taxes, cause riots, demonstrate politically, etc. Remember the fundamental purpose of us as Christians is to "build up the body of Christ." Part of that includes preaching the Gospel. In cases where that is strictly forbidden is the main reason I can see for invoking a "higher law."
 - c) Before we move on, think about the last thing Peter said: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."
 - i) For Peter, to be admonished by the Sanhedrin meant the threat of excommunication, which means one is "as good as dead," an outcast of society to any other Jew who crosses his path. To continue preaching Jesus also meant the threat of further jail time.
 - ii) Peter is saying something powerful here. He is saying, in effect, look folks, we aren't just making this stuff up. John and I have seen him *alive* again. John and I ate food with him *post-resurrection*! Can a "ghost" do that? In comparison to that, these threats seem meaningless.
 - a) As Peter said in one his letters: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses [emphasis added] of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16 NIV)
13. Meanwhile, back to the Jewish council meeting. Verse 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.
 - a) They couldn't deny the miraculous, but they refused to give up their power base. They were simply silent, as they didn't know what to do.
 - b) The "silence/I don't know" attitude of the Jewish council is worth making a point.

- i) I take the theory that when "guilty" people are confronted with the real truth of Jesus, *they are often left silent*. They are staring at the truth, but because their hearts are "hard," they just refuse to say anything.
 - c) Two examples come to mind to support this verse and this theory.
 - i) The first is a confrontation of Jesus with the Pharisees. They tried to trap Jesus with a question. Jesus turned it around and asked them about John the Baptist: "...John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men' (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.'" Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." (Mark 11:30-33)
 - d) One more example. Jesus was giving a parable about those who are "invited" into the Kingdom of Heaven. He talked about a person who "snuck in" uninvited.
 - i) "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. 'Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Matthew 22:11-13 NIV)
14. Okay, "showtime" is over in front of the Sanhedrin. It's time for a praise and prayer meeting with the disciples. Verse 23: On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' ²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.
- a) Okay, what's happening here? Peter and John knew that a "severe warning from the Sanhedrin was not exactly "a slap on the wrist." They knew that, for them or any other Jewish Christian, to further preach Jesus now became a jail threat, whipping, or worse!
 - b) I think it was also "sinking in" to them who they were up against.
 - i) The Jewish authorities were now "anti-Jesus."
 - ii) The Roman authorities were anti-Jesus."
 - iii) The "gentiles" (a.k.a. "non-Jews" were, in the disciples' minds, against them. The gospel had *yet* to be preached to the Gentile world, at this point.
 - iv) Their only hope? Turn to God in prayer.
 - c) The prayer started with "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them."
 - i) Why did they say this? Was God not aware of this?
 - ii) The reminder of prayers like this is to remind *ourselves* that God is in control. He made the world in the first place. He knows *all things*! God cannot "learn."
 - a) We tend to forget, as Christians, that "us and God make a majority." If you are part of God's game plan, the *ultimate* victory is ours. Read the end of the Bible. We win!
 - d) Next Peter quotes from Psalm 2: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one.'

- i) Peter is stating that God has stated (prophecy) that the world would be against us. It's hard to imagine (logically) that the world would go to battle *against* God. That is pretty much what this verse in Psalms is saying. That kings of the earth and rulers will gather to *battle* against God and his "anointed one," i.e. the Messiah.
 - a) Why would they? Don't they realize God "is" God?
 - b) The answer is to realize the root of all sin is pride. People aren't willing to worship the true and living God because of pride. They want to live their life *their* way and not God's way.
 - c) Jesus said: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you [emphasis added]. (John 15:19 NIV)
- ii) If you think about it, even the devil and demons *believe* Jesus is God. What is the difference between them and us? The difference is that we are *obedient* to what God calls us to do. *That* is what makes you a Christian, the *evidence* of your faith.

15. Peter continues his prayer, Verse 28: They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."
- a) First Peter, through prayer, reminds himself and his listeners that God is in charge.
 - b) Next, Peter reminds himself and his listeners that all of this rebellion *against* God was predicted (a.k.a. prophesied) in the Psalms.
 - c) So what does Peter do next? Prays for *boldness* to stand up to the enemy.
 - d) Remember what boldness *is* and *is not*:
 - i) Boldness *is not* the self-discipline to stand up under fire and go forward.
 - ii) Boldness *is* a supernatural act. It is to pray for the Holy Spirit to work *through you* to act boldly and confidently to *be* a witness for Jesus Christ.
 - e) The last part is interesting. Peter is asking for God to allow them to "heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders in your name."
 - i) Peter is asking for more miracles. Think about why and why not.
 - a) It was not so Peter could go on television and line up people so they could "fall backwards" at Peter's touch. ☺
 - b) It was not so Peter could go to the nearest hospital and touch everybody in sight.
 - (1) Remember that Jesus did not *heal everybody in Israel*. Jesus only healed specific people for specific demonstrations of who he is and for validation of who he was.
 - (2) It is interesting to note that Jesus never refused *anybody* who came to him. He sometimes delayed their healing for testing purposes, just as God delays his answers with us for similar purposes, to test our faith.
 - c) Peter was asking for *specific* "signs and wonders" to validate *Jesus*, not himself. God has, and does continue to grant amazing signs and wonders, not to "clear hospitals," but as examples to show the *power* of Jesus and the power of believing in his name.

16. God then showed how proud he was of this prayer in a visual way. Verse 31: 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.
- a) I think this is God's way of saying, "That's the way guys. Great prayer. Go for it! I'm sending my Holy Spirit so you *can* go forth boldly."
 - b) Why the earthquake? I think that was a pun. Just as God "shook" the house, this group, now up to 5,000, is going to "shake" the whole world.
 - i) It's pretty amazing when you think about the history that happened. The Roman Empire, the largest single empire in the history of civilization, *became a Christian oriented empire!* The Jewish leaders, who vehemently opposed the growth of Christianity, lost. The number of Jews today is relatively small versus the number of Christians in the world. For 2,000 years, multitudes of people have sworn allegiance to Jesus Christ. It all started with 11 guys, a few women, and whole lot of prayer!
17. The next few verses are sort of an epilogue. There are times in a group where things are going so well that the joy just becomes contagious. Verse 32: All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time, those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.
- a) Scholars have debated these set of verses for centuries, as to their merit. There have been some (on one extreme) who call for all Christians to live in a socialistic environment. The other extreme is to believe that this applies only to this certain group, and not to us.
 - i) The "balance" of course, is to consider some of each. There are times we need to have a giving heart. Our focus needs to be on Jesus *over* our possessions. That is probably one "weakness in faith" of living in a capitalistic society.
 - a) Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26 NIV)
 - b) Jesus is not teaching to hate your parents, but to give Jesus *priority* over all of these things.
 - c) I believe there are times and situations where Christians *must* live like these disciples in order to thrive.
 - ii) As stated in the last chapter, this is not a call to communism or socialism. This is a small group of believers, who *had* to depend upon each other, as they had become outcasts in the Jewish world.
 - a) Also, in the next chapter, we'll read about how Peter scolds a husband and wife for deceiving the church over lying about how much money they donated. Peter makes it clear they were under no obligation to give the money. The retribution was for the deception:
 - (1) "The property was yours to sell or not, as you wished. And after selling it, it was yours to decide how much to give. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us, but to God." (Acts 5:4 The Living Bible (TLB))

- b) I do believe that in small groups, one can have a fellowship like this. The key is the verse, "they were all of one heart and mind." (Verse 32).
 - i) People *voluntarily* gave to those in need. No one was *forced* to sell anything.
 - ii) They grew in faith to a point where their personal possessions had little meaning to them anymore.
 - iii) Their focus was on preaching Jesus and the Kingdom of God.
- 18. Last verse is a separate commentary by the author, Luke. Verse 36: Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.
 - a) This Joseph guy was nicknamed Barnabus. It would be like nicknaming someone today "The Encourager."
 - i) There is a positive thing to be remembered in history for!
 - ii) All churches and groups need encouragement and encouragers, from time to time.
 - a) It is an important role in a group of believers to have encouragers.
 - b) Barnabus has a supporting role in the Book of Acts.
 - i) He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey.
 - ii) I suspect Luke thought a lot of him, and gave him this special "plug" during this early point in the ministry.
- 19. With that, it's time to wrap it up! Let's Pray: Father, like the disciples, we remember that you are the God who created the Heavens and the Earth. You know *all* things. You are aware of all things. The ultimate victory is yours. Through the Holy Spirit, give us boldness to go forth as part of your *plan*, to be obedient to the specific ministry(s) that you have called for our lives. Fill us with that boldness, and even signs and wonders, that we may be good witnesses for you. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.