

Acts 4 - John Karmelich

In the last two lessons, we read of the Christian church's birth. We had the whole "tongue thing" which was the main event of Chapter 2 (The Holy Spirit given to believers). Then in Chapter 3 we read of the first miracle without Jesus "there in the room". In those chapters remember that the church grew from 120 people to 3,000. I'd estimate Chapter 4 is probably within 1-2 weeks of when they started. In this chapter we'll read of 5,000 adult men joining the church. That means by the time we'll get to the end of Chapter 4, the number of Christians is now about 20,000 counting the women and kids. That brings me to my favorite question: Now what? Once we start using our lives to make a difference for Jesus, what does God call us to do next? The answer is a bunch of things that occur in Chapter 4.

With that said, let me summarize that chapter and that'll lead back to me answering that question. This chapter in effect begins with the same scene of Chapter 3. Peter and the disciples did their first miracle without Jesus physically standing there! The miracle was a man who never ever walked in his life. He started walking and leaping with no practice as if he's been doing it all his life. Remember there's now a large group of Christians here in Jerusalem that had nowhere to meet other than a large open patio on the temple mount. Imagine what would occur when a large-group like this holds a Christian bible study in one of the most sacred Jewish places! What you'd expect, the church leaders got arrested when they preached Jesus there!

It may help to keep in mind the cooperation between the Jewish leaders and Rome. Romans only had two key rules: 1) Pay your taxes and 2) don't rebel against Rome. The Romans also decided who was to be the Jewish high priest in order to maintain the order. Jewish historical records from then indicate that the High Priest's family were corrupt and profited well from their duties. Meanwhile the disciples "threw a wrench" in the cooperation between the Jewish leadership and Rome. My point is because of the disciples preaching in the temple, it led to Peter and John being arrested for well, preaching Jesus!

By this time, it was late in the day. So Peter and John were put in jail overnight. The trial was the next day. The high priest's family gathered to ask them a bunch of questions about how they made the lame man walk! They asked "By what power did you do this?" Remember this is the first miracle with Jesus not present. Peter probably thought, "Cool, I get to preach to the top guys in Israel! I'll just explain the gospel message!" He emphasizes that there's no way to get to heaven except through Jesus! That must have gone over well with those religious leaders there! The problem is everyone there saw that former lame man standing and jumping up and down, so they couldn't deny the miracle.

The Jewish leaders then told the disciples to "cut it out". Yes the bible tells us we're to obey those who rule over us, but not when it contradicts God's commands to us. (Thus the debate over whether we can assemble for church during the virus scare!) Here's a more obvious example, if our government leaders tell us that it's ok to murder someone, that goes against the 10 Commandments. Jesus commands us to make disciples from all nations, so the "cut it out" order didn't well, cut it! Given the fact those leaders were staring at the healed man, there was nothing they could do but tell Peter and John to cut it out!

So what did the disciples do next? They do what any of us should do after that ordeal? Pray about it! Ask God what to do next. One of them started reciting Psalm 2 which in effect asks the questions why do both the Jewish and Gentile leaders rebel against God and His Messiah? Remember both the Jewish leaders and Gentile ones (think Romans) conspired to have Jesus killed. Since the religious leaders told the disciples to cut it out, they asked God what I'd ask for: Boldness! For what it's worth, I start almost

every day with asking God to give me wisdom and boldness to be a good witness for Him. I figured if that's what the disciples did, I take it as my marching orders to do likewise!

So did God answer their prayer? Immediately after praying the ground started shaking. I'd take that as a big yes answer! So why doesn't the ground shake when we pray for boldness? Because we have His word as a model of how we're supposed to act. Not only was their ground shaken, but all of them now had the Holy Spirit working in them. Let me touch on that for a second: God the Father gave the Holy Spirit to the church in Chapter 2 (again the whole "tongues" thing). The Spirit is something we have to access in use! There's no magic formula to it. It's a matter of asking God to guide us and trusting that He is! Yes it's available to all believers. If you believe Jesus is God and He's Lord of our lives, then I am positive you have access to the Holy Spirit!

At this point it would help to keep in mind that with a group of roughly 20,000 people and no buildings to meet in, so many people would have financial needs to live. A Christian in that Jewish community is going to be ex-communicated from that society to put it mildly. Therefore in order for people to eat or have a place to lay their heads, people would have to give. The text says people gave and they all had "stuff in common". I should state God believes in private ownership! One of the 10 Commandments is to not steal. We can't steal if people didn't own things! Christians aren't required to give all they have. It's a matter of people volunteering to help others in need.

The final line of the chapter is about a man named Joseph who was called Barnabas. He gave a tract of land as a donation. He was singled out as he worked with Paul on his missionary journeys. We'll read more of Barnabas in the coming chapters.

OK John, that's neat ancient history and I believe it's all accurate. Why should I care? The issue for us is what Jesus calls us to do as believers. Go be a witness for Him! What's our reward for doing that? I would say it's more opportunities to be a witness for Him and persecution. I learned a long time ago if I want to make a difference for Jesus, "Bad stuff happens" and I have to get used to it! Yes God's kept me going through a lot of stuff, but I always trust in His power, pray for His guidance and for boldness as I can't imagine anything in life more important than being used by the God of the Universe.

As one of my mentors taught me, "Without God we can't. Without us, God won't." He decided that He wanted to get His people involved in His game plan. Does that mean we all have to quit our jobs as to go be missionaries? Some of us are called to be missionaries in other parts of the world. Most of us are called to be a witness for Jesus, right where we are! Grant it, being a Christian doesn't mean we are to grab a stranger, start whacking the bible on his or her head and force them to accept Jesus. The issue is to be a good witness for Him. Pray for opportunities to be used by Him and we will. Yes, that includes service in our churches and may other ministry opportunities. As I love to preach, find ways to do the things we enjoy doing and use our talents for His glory! Yes the "trash has to go out too" which simply means we all have to chip in to do things we may not enjoy doing. Over and above what we got to do, there are great ways to be a witness for Him as we go through our lives. That's the great lesson here!

With that said, this lesson will cover some more background notes as well as go through Chapter 4 on a verse by verse basis. If you're new here, what you've read so far is about 15% of this study. To read the rest of it click on one of the other two links on this chapter. You're always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John

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