

Acts 4 (NIV)

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

4:1 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, 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; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

Chapter 4 continues after Peter and John healed the lame beggar. “So, the priests, captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John.” Why do you suppose that the Sadducees are named but not the Pharisees? Besides the fact that the Sadducees were in power at this time in history, their beliefs were being attacked more by what John and Peter were saying. Although there were differences in the beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Sadducees rejected life after death or the resurrection of the dead. They also interpreted the law differently. Leviticus 24:20 says “an eye in for an eye”, the Pharisaic understanding was that the value of an eye was to be paid by the perpetrator. In the Sadducees' view, the words were given a more literal interpretation, in which the offender's eye would be removed.

The whole purpose of this ordeal was meant to intimidate John and Peter. It had to be a troubling ordeal for them. John and Peter spending the night in jail made me think of someone that was drunk and disorderly. Spend the night in jail to sober up or in this case, one night in jail to make you think correctly. As you read these early chapters of Acts, I want you to consider the difference in the behavior of the disciples, as well as the Jewish leaders. Throughout the final chapters of the Gospels, the disciples were tentative, lost and unsure of themselves when Jesus was crucified. Here they are speaking boldly. Unafraid of what might happen to their physical bodies. You find yourself asking, “Are these the same men?” The answer is “No”. They have been forever changed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I was recently asked, “Why did Jesus have to leave?” I believe that part of the reason is so that the Holy Spirit could come and give God’s power to all believers. In His human form, Jesus was one man but the Holy Spirit could indwell all believers thus forever changing the lives of numerous believers. Additionally, many men tend to be followers unless challenged or pushed to step out. For three years these men followed Jesus. After Jesus was crucified they returned to fishing. This wasn’t what God wanted them to do. Christianity would have ended if it had been left up to these disciples alone. Acts 1:8 tells us that they received power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. It was the life-changing power of God through the Holy Spirit.

The Jewish leaders finished those same verses victorious. They had crucified Jesus and ended what they considered heresy. At that time they were sure they wanted Him dead. Now they seem unsure of what they want. It is interesting how God can use us for His own purposes. Throughout Jesus entire life until today, the majority of Jews have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. This won’t change until the end times but the message is reaching Jews. We are told that their number grew from about 120 members to 3000 (see Acts 2:41) to 5000 members.

4:5 The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others 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?”

Pontius Pilate named Caiaphas the High Priest over his father-in-law, Annas, but you have to figure that he still had the power even though he was no longer the high priest. These are the same high priests that Jesus appeared before. Five of Annas' sons became high priest's after Caiaphas. The Jewish leaders asked Peter and John "By what power or what name did you do this?" They wanted to know by whose authority they were teaching. You can almost picture kids in a schoolyard, saying "Who said you could?"

4:8 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 man who was lame and are being 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 Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

In verse 9 the words "called to account" are translated from the Greek word 'anakinomai' which means that this was a preliminary inquiry and not a full trial. Peter and John answer the Jewish leaders with "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" and then by accusing them of the crucifixion of Jesus. They also poked these Sadducees by saying the God raised Jesus from the dead and they credited Jesus with healing the lame man. Peter called Jesus "the stone you builders rejected" from Psalm 118:22. Peter says that salvation can only come from Jesus and there is no one else that can save you.

"Instinctively, man responds: "Isn't there some way that I can save myself? Isn't Jesus just for those ones who can't save themselves?" No. If you are going to be rescued; if you are going to be made right with God, Jesus is going to do it." (Guzik)

4:13 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.

These Jewish leaders saw the boldness of Peter and John. They also realized that they were uneducated and ordinary. The Jewish leaders were astonished but then they realized that they had been with Jesus. The text tells us that the healed man was standing right there with them and this truly shut up the Jewish leaders. They could not argue with the facts.

4:15 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. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it.17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

The Jewish leaders ordered Peter and John to step out so they could decide what to do. The discussion sounds more like a political discussion than a religious one. The Jewish leaders were more concerned about how it would look to the people than being amazed by the healing of the lame man. No one that saw the healed lame man could deny that this was truly a miraculous sign.

4:18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

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.

The Jewish leaders told Peter and John to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. Peter and John did not agree to do that. They said they should listen to God and not them (the Jewish leaders). They were going to testify to what they had seen and heard. What threats can you imagine these Jewish leaders would use to scare the disciples? After all, they did get Jesus put to death by crucifixion. They couldn't punish Peter and John because the people were praising God. This man had been lame for over 40 years.

The Believers Pray

4:23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the 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 heavens 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 rise up
and the rulers band 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. 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 signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

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.

When Peter and John told the other believers about their experience, what was their response? They specifically prayed about the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. They also prayed for boldness to speak and power to perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. After they prayed the place was shaken.

The Believers Share Their Possessions

4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

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.

Dr. Luke tells us about how the Christians in the first church had great unity but he told us that these Christians were unselfish because they shared their possessions.

All things in common: It isn't accurate to see this as an early form of communism. Communism is not koinonia. "Communism says, 'What is yours is mine; I'll take it.' Koinonia says, 'What is mine is yours, I'll share it.'" (LaSor)

Luke even gave an example of such a believer. This believer had two names, Joseph and Barnabas. Joseph was his name given at birth and Barnabas was given at re-birth. Barnabas was a good example because he was willing to sell land and give the money to the family without any stipulations. This was truly sacrificial giving.