

Acts 4

The healing of the lame man brought great attention to the apostles and some of that came from the elite sect called the Saducees. The sect was a minority group compared with the Pharisees, but they occupied important positions in Judaism. They were the priests and the Levitical element of society. Their chief quarrel with the apostles was the apostolic doctrine of the resurrection of Christ. Angered that this doctrine, odious to them, was proclaimed in their very own domain (as they viewed it), they arrested the apostles, placing them in prison over night. But, the miracle had it's desired effect: many believed and the number of disciples now came to be about 5,000.

Morning light brought time for trial and doubtlessly misgivings. Carefully the rulers posed their questions to the apostles: "By what power or in what name have ye done this?" An ambiguous question at the very least (Acts 4:7). The apostles gave them no advantage! "If we this day are examined concerning a good deed done to an impotent man," they respond (Acts 4:9). How much more foolish could they appear? They had arrested the apostles for a good deed done to an impotent man and they realized they had taken hold of a "hot issue" indeed. The apostles informed them that it was by the name (authority) of Jesus through which the man had been healed, then added: "...whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead...He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12). This was bold preaching! What will the accusers do? They will do nothing. They confer together and then command the apostles to speak no more in the name of Jesus to which the apostles firmly respond, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard" (Acts 4:19f).

The apostles retired to their own company (other apostles, not the church) and rehearsed their experiences before the council. When the others heard of their trial, they said, "Oh Lord, thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David thy servant didst say: Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Anointed..." (Acts 4:24-27). The apostles had not yet experienced the full fury of the wrath of the

authorities for more was to come. Yet they must have realized this was not the conclusion of the conflict, just an omen of more serious and extreme measures to come. Their Lord had warned them, "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you; yea and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles..." (Matt. 10:17f).

Still, while they acknowledged that Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel were in "cohoots" against Jesus, they did only "whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass" (Acts 4:28). They concluded their prayer to God that He would empower them to speak the word with boldness and continue to witness that their words were true by allowing them to work signs and wonders, through the outstretched hand of healing. So, the place was shaken and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Persecutions and trials have a way of making closer bonds between those who are the persecuted, and so it was with the brethren. They were of one heart and soul; they shared their material wealth with their fellow brethren; those who had houses and lands sold them and brought the money and laid it at the apostles feet (under their oversight); one of which was a Levite from Cyprus, named Barnabas, who will play a prominent role in some of the chapters to come.

"And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33).

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