

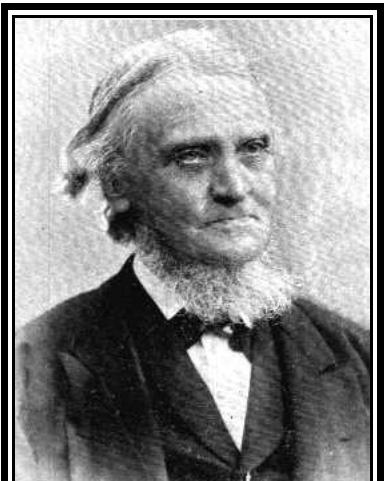
Authority above all

I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.

-- Luke 21:15

Study 6A: THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT (4:1-12)

4:1-4 Which good news did the first Christians believe and God bless? (I Cor.15:1-8) [David Reed calculates JW's take 3000 hours for ONE convert]



MacLaren of Manchester
"Something in the manner and matter of it awed them into wonder, and paralysed them"

Now this -- and nothing else -- is the gospel! Nothing can be added to that. The apostles preached a great many other things that were not included in that, but they were not the gospel. The gospel is that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried and that He rose again the third day. That was exactly the gospel which was preached on the day of Pentecost, and that was exactly the gospel Peter preached after the healing of the lame man as recorded in chapter three. Nothing else is the gospel. There is no other gospel. -- **H. Ironside**, Acts p.99

The police action is taken by a group of people responsible for public order within the temple area. It includes some of the priests who were on duty at the time. They were led by the *captain of the temple*, the official in charge of the temple police, ... the priest who ranked next to the high priest. The Sadducees were not a legal body. The name was applied to a political grouping which drew most of its support from the priesthood and the lay readers of

the community (the 'elders'). We are probably, therefore, to think here of lay people who sided with the priests in their opposition to the church. Luke has used the term 'Sadducees' to indicate their religious and political outlook. It is interesting that, although the Pharisees were the group most opposed to Jesus during his ministry, in Acts they are almost friendly to the church, while the Sadducees (who do not figure in

the Gospels until the last days of Jesus) have become the leaders of the opposition. -- **I. H. Marshall**, *The Acts* p.98

The motives actuating the assailants are significantly analysed, and may be distributed among the 3 classes enumerated. The priests and the captain of the Temple would be annoyed by the very fact that Peter and John taught the people: The former, because they were jealous of their official prerogative: the latter, because he was responsible for public order, and a riot in the Temple court would have been a scandal. The Sadducees were indignant at the substance of the teaching, which affirmed the resurrection of the dead, which they denied, and alleged it as having occurred 'in Jesus.' -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *Acts* p.129

The Sadducees held by tradition the high-priestly office. Collaborators with the Roman order, rationalists in doctrine, they were sensitive of everything likely to disturb the comfortable status they had won (cf. Jn.xi.47-50), and especially saw danger in popular excitement arising from such Pharisaic teaching as that of the resurrection. -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *Acts* p.64

4:5,6 What has forged this triple alliance? (cf. v.1; Luke 22:2; 23:12)

The three groups mentioned are probably the three components of the Sanhedrin. The *elders* were the lay leaders of the community, no doubt the heads of the principal aristocratic families, mostly of Sadducean outlook. The *scribes* were drawn from the class of lawyers, and mostly belonged to the Pharisaic party. The other group mentioned, the *rulers*, must be identified with the priestly element in the Sanhedrin; sometimes called the chief priests, these were the holders of various official positions in the administration of the temple. -- **I. Howard Marshall**, *op.cit.*, p.99

By what power: the prosecutors use *dunamis*, not *exousia*, which contains the notion of authority. The implication is that the apostles had acted by illegal incantation and the processes of magic. -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *The Acts of the Apostles* p.67

4:7-12 Analyse Peter's apologetic approach (I Peter 3:15,16)

1. his attitude

One cannot but note the calmness of the Apostle, so unlike his old tumultuous self. He begins with acknowledging the lawful authority of the court, ... It was 'a good deed done to an impotent man,' for which John and he stood there. Singular sort of crime that! Was there not a presumption that the power which had wrought so 'good' a deed was good? 'Do men gather grapes of thorns?' Many a time since then Christianity has been treated as criminal, because of its beneficence to bodies and souls. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *op.cit.*, p.132

2. his evidence (i.e. authority; v.10; cf. v.20)

Peter liked the quotation about the stone. Petros was the name that Christ had given him (John 1:42). -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *Birth* p.37

Here Peter does not add as he did in 2:32; 3:15: "of which we are witnesses." Their testimony regarding the resurrection of Jesus would be scorned by the Sanhedrists. Peter points to the testimony that even these vicious haters of Jesus cannot deny, namely the healed beggar standing there before their eyes ... No dead Jesus could work a miracle such as this; the risen and glorified Jesus alone could do that. So Jesus had healed when he was alive; lo, so he had healed now after the Sanhedrin had crucified him! -- **R. Lenski**, *op.cit.*, p.163

3. his emphasis (cf. v.2)

Is not the sequence in Peter's defence substantially that which all Christian preaching should exhibit? First, strong, plain proclamation of the truth; then pungent pressing home of the sin of turning away from Jesus; and then the earnest setting forth of the salvation in His name, -- a salvation wide as the world, and deep as our misery and need, but narrow, inasmuch as it is 'in none other.' The Apostle will not end with charging his hearers with guilt, but with offering them salvation. He will end with lifting up 'the Name' high above all others, and setting it in solitary clearness before, not these rulers only, but the whole world ... The rulers' contempt had been expressed by their emphatic ending of their question with that 'ye.' Peter expresses his brotherhood and longing for the good of his judges by ending his impassioned, or, rather, inspired address with a loving, pleading 'we.' He puts himself on the same level with them as needing salvation, and would fain have them on the same level with himself and John as receiving it. That is the right way to preach. -- **A. MacLaren**, p.134

The permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a believer must be contrasted with special moments of inspiration, such as the present, which was a fulfilment of our Lord's promise in Mk. xiii.11 and parallel passages. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *Acts* [Grk] p.120

It is impossible to state to what extent Peter's defence has been abbreviated. As it stands in the text it is a gem of concentrated evangelism, and contains, for all its brevity, the familiar features of his style. Notice that the audience is addressed with all respect; the hearers' own experience is referred to; facts are proclaimed fearlessly; the appeal is clear and uncompromising; Scripture is aptly quoted, and just how aptly the recollection of Mt.xxi.42 (== Mk.xii.10; Lk.xx.17) will indicate. -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *Acts* p.65

Study 6B: PROCLAIMING THE GOODNESS, POWER & WISDOM OF GOD (4:13-22)

4:13-16 Why was criticism silenced? (cf. v.9; Matt.12:31-33)

Something in the manner and matter of it awed them into wonder, and paralysed them for the time. Here was the first instance of the fulfilment of that promise, which had been fulfilled again and again since, of 'a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.' -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *op.cit.*, p.135

The effect produced upon the Sanhedrin was *astonishment*: first at the *boldness* of *Peter and John* in thus accusing them; then at their use of scripture, when it was obvious that ... they had not been trained in the technical learning of the rabbinical schools. This is the meaning of *unlearned*; and in this sense the Lord himself had never learnt ... They were *ignorant*: the Greek word is 'idiots' and an 'idiot' was a private person who possessed no official position or special ability. -- **R B. Rackham**, *Acts* p.59

The verse does not mean that the apostles' eloquence led the court (for the first time) to realize that they were connected with Jesus. Perhaps the Jewish leaders remembered how difficult it had been to win an argument with Jesus. They were having the same difficulty now, and it was compounded by the fact that the healed man was there for all to see. It is not clear why he was present. Had he been arrested as well? Or was the court meeting held in public? Luke has not bothered to tell us. What mattered was that the court was left bereft of an answer to the situation; Luke's readers might have remembered the promise in Luke 21:15 ... -- **I. H. Marshall**, *Acts* p.101

Compare criticism of Christians today (I Peter 3:13-17)

4:17-22 What is left for "authorities" when Divine Authority cannot be gainsaid (Luke 21:12-19 -- note sequel)

It was a daring stroke to appeal to the council for an endorsement of the principle in verse 9, but the appeal was unanswerable; for this tribunal had no other ostensible reason for existence than to enforce obedience to the law of God, and to Peter's dilemma only one reply was possible. -- **Alexander MacLaren**, *op.cit.*, p.146

Notice that in this verse we have indirect speech; in the direct speech of ver. 17 the personal name of Jesus is avoided, as frequently in later Jewish references to Him (e.g., He is sometimes referred to as *Peloni*, 'So and so'). -- **F.F. Bruce**, *Acts* [Grk] p.124

This significant aversion to pronouncing even the name still exists to this day. **R.C.H. Lenski** *op.cit.*, p.171

It is particularly striking that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion (so far as our information goes) did the Sanhedrin take any serious action to disprove the apostles' central affirmation -- the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin have seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed! It is plain that the apostles meant a physical resurrection when they said that Jesus was risen; it is equally plain that the rulers understand them in this sense. -- **F.F. Bruce**, *The Book of Acts* p.103

It is a fine piece of reporting, no doubt direct from Peter to Luke. Or was Paul in the assembly? It is well to watch Luke's every word. The healed man was "standing" with them. The words *straitly threaten* (17 KJV) reflect a Hebraic construction of emphasis. The actual statement is almost audible. -- **E.M. Blaiklock**, *op.cit.*, p.39

Topic for meditation: WHY AREN'T CHRISTIANS PERSECUTED TODAY (in the West)?

NEXT: **PRAYER and POWER** (read to end of chapter 5)