

## FRIDAY 17 June 2022 "STOP!" (Acts 4:13-23)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*Have you ever found yourself speechless in a situation that has deeply impacted you, but you simply can't find the words to express what your mind is thinking, and your heart is feeling?* That is exactly where I left you yesterday in Jerusalem. The room was filled with the 70 members of the Sanhedrin, the High Priest, and many other religious leaders, the most powerful men in Jerusalem. Peter and John, Galilean fishermen, disciples of Jesus had just been escorted out of the room by guards, leaving this learned group of scholars to debate and decide what to do with these two fishermen?

*Also standing in this crowded room of Jerusalem authorities was a living miracle.* He was a simple beggar whose name is unrecorded in the Acts 3 & 4 account. But this cripple is suddenly famous in Jerusalem. Why? Because all his life he has been known as a beggar, crippled from birth, who sat in a familiar spot near the Temple gate called Beautiful. These pompous religious leaders had walked by him hundreds of times over the years, but on this day, he is not only standing, but occasionally he jumps up and down, just for the fun of it, since he's never stood on his crippled feet before!

*Peter had made an impassioned speech to these religious authorities which included two powerful statements which these leaders simply cannot ignore: **"It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who YOU crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed!"*** (Acts 4:10) What a powerful, bold accusation and declaration! But they knew it was true... they had condemned Jesus to die, perhaps in this very room, only about 100 days before. Some of them had probably watched him die on that cross. They had also heard the reports, from their own guards who had been at the tomb, that Jesus was raised from the dead and His tomb was empty, even though sealed and guarded. We don't know if any of these men in that room had seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes, but certainly there were many, many people who claimed they had!

The other statement which was still reverberating in that room and in their minds was what Peter had said just before he was briskly ushered out of the room: **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12) For centuries the people had begged the religious leaders to help them understand how to be saved from their sin, but all the leaders could do was point to a 1400-year-old animal sacrifice system and hundreds of laws and rules. *Jesus, however, presented a new salvation opportunity provided by God through Jesus' atonement death and resurrection... the Gospel.*

These religious leaders, however, totally rejected Jesus or any notion that He was their long-awaited Messiah and certainly gave no consideration to His claim to be the Son of God.

But at this moment, these powerful men were speechless in response to both what Peter had said, and the healed crippled man standing, and occasionally jumping, right in front of them. Luke summarizes this historic moment in these words: **"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say."** (Acts 4:13,14)

Have you wondered, friends, why it is so difficult for our world to acknowledge the obvious evidence of God at work all around us? Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God. So... just look up, day or night, and be awed by the predictable, complex, awesomeness of the sun, moon, stars, clouds and our very delicate atmosphere!

Romans 1:20 says **"Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that mankind is without excuse."** It's true... *everything you and I see or touch or taste or smell or hear has either been made by God or fabricated by man from something God made!* Now think about that... And yet mankind, in every part of the world, refuses to acknowledge God or give God the honor He deserves or consider pursuing the relationship which God offers us through Jesus. And so, these wise, educated, Jerusalem religious leaders, who all have as their life purpose to help people pursue God and find God's answers to their life questions... these men, stunned by what Peter had said, are speechless. All they can do is insist that Peter and John are removed from the room so they can try to figure out what to do next.

The record says: **"They conferred together. 'What are we going to do with these men? Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle and we cannot deny it. 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.'" (Acts 4:15-17)** So I ask you my friends, does that sound like an intelligent, logical, wise, God honoring response and plan? *Remember these are the most educated and most respected men in Jerusalem in the first century!* But wherever you are in the world, do you suppose similar statements are made behind closed doors where you live? What closed doors? Closed doors of political discussions. Closed doors of healthcare leaders or business and economic advisors or attorneys or judges or educators at all levels? Could it be that statements like these are even being made behind closed doors of religious leaders in your city? *Are there leaders in almost every segment of your society who are intent, determined that Jesus is NOT honored, NOT welcomed, NOT in any way influencing your city?* Do you see evidence of that?

Look now, Peter and John are being brought back into this crowded and confused room to stand before these important leaders. The High Priest was likely the one to speak and the record simply says: **"they were commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."**

Silence hangs in the room for a moment as Peter and John look at each other, rubbing their foreheads, perhaps they even whispered in each other's ear for a moment. Then they replied with the same courage and boldness they had spoken before: "***Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.***" (Acts 4:19,20)

Oh my, did you feel it? The temperature in the room just went up several degrees! Peter and John were immovable, unshakable. They had spent months with Jesus. They had heard His messages and seen His miracles. John had stood at His cross and watched Him die. They had seen Him alive after His crucifixion, they had watched Jesus elevate into the sky going back to heaven. And more, they had received and been empowered by the Holy Spirit Jesus had promised to send them! *There was simply no way they could deny Jesus nor stop sharing their story, the most amazing, good news ever spoken, and calling people to do as this cripple had done... trust in Jesus and then experience Jesus' power unleashed in their life!*

Luke records that "***After further threats they let Peter and John go. They could not decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over 40 years old!***" (Acts 4:21) I often have wondered what was said in that room among those high-powered men after those simple but bold fishermen walked out? Standing among them, but not named here, is a very zealous young man who was undoubtedly fuming... Saul Paulus of Tarsus. We'll meet him several days from now, when finally, his anger erupts in violence as he stands watch over the stoning execution of Stephen the deacon, and Saul begins a passionate persecution in Jerusalem to erase the memory of Jesus. (Acts 8:1)

Peter and John returned to the place where their friends and other followers of Jesus were gathered, I presume praying for them. They reported what their experience had been and tomorrow we'll see the dramatic response which once again ignited a spiritual momentum in Jerusalem. *For today, I urge us all to look closely at our part of the world. What tactics are being utilized in an attempt to silence Jesus, silence God's truth, and silence the true followers of Jesus in your city?* What is God doing in response to those silencing attempts? How is God involving you, emboldening you, guiding you to be part of Jesus' efforts to push back the darkness in your city? Here's a powerful song to help you think about this, my friends:

**Today's Scripture is Acts 4:13-23.**