

THURSDAY 16 June 2022 "Called to Account" (Acts 4:5-12)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I wonder if you've ever been 'called to account' for something you said or did?

Whether it happens as a child with your parents, or a student with teachers or principal, or a police officer, or a judge, or a boss... depending on what you've done, being 'called to account' can be frightening, right?

I left you yesterday standing outside a jail cell in Jerusalem watching Peter and John being locked up by those who did not like that these two disciples of Jesus were proclaiming that God had raised Jesus from the dead and by that same power God had healed a crippled man who had great faith in the name and person of Jesus! Peter and John spent the night in that jail and now shortly after sunrise, men with great authority were gathering to determine their fate.

Let's rejoin them... Acts 4:5 says ***"The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem... They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'"*** The room is packed with people, many wearing fancy robes symbolizing their authority.

Look around the room, friends... many of these were the same men before whom Jesus had stood less than 100 days ago, as they had questioned Him and then condemned Jesus to death! *These men were some of the smartest people in Jerusalem and they hated Jesus and His followers.* Their voices were angry, their eyes squinting with hatred, their fingers pointing at Peter and John as they demanded answers! It was a terrifying moment as these fishermen disciples of Jesus were being 'called to account' for having helped a crippled man. Can you put yourself in their sandals? What would you have felt, having spent all night in a jail cell? *What answers can you think of which will respond to the anger of these men and keep you from getting a beating or worse?*

The record says: ***"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel. 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 4:8-10) Look at them, these proud, pompous, influential, wealthy, powerful, intelligent men in their royal robes. The veins in their necks are bulging, their fists are clenched, their eyes wide open, their breathing intense. *They look like they are about to explode! No human being has ever spoken to any of them like this and certainly not when they are all gathered together as the Sanhedrin tribunal!*

But Peter was empowered, **'filled with the Holy Spirit'**. Jesus had promised His disciples that the Spirit of God would come upon them and fill them with courage and wisdom and guide them to speak the right words in times like these. Jesus had predicted they would be confronted, arrested, questioned, persecuted and called to account! (John 15:18-16:4) Peter paused only for a few seconds, not giving these pompous looking powerful men the opportunity to respond. *Peter's mind was racing, the Holy Spirit was directing Peter what to say next in this critical defining moment.*

Taking a deep breath Peter continued, now with a raised, passionate voice, this fisherman, disciple Peter quotes the holy books to the scholars: **'The stone you builders rejected, has become the capstone.'** I tell you my friends, this absolutely amazes me. I would think Peter would be trembling, begging for mercy from this very powerful Sanhedrin tribunal who had condemned Jesus first to a beating, and then to death, and then sent Jesus to Pilate for execution. Instead, Peter stands resolute, fearless, determined to challenge them, in their own courtroom, with a Scripture they treasured. Peter was quoting from Psalm 118 which praises God for His protection and deliverance of Israel in times past. I think Peter was feeling what the Psalmist had written hundreds of years before: **"In my anguish I cried to the LORD and He answered by setting me free. The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me, He is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies!"** (Ps. 118:5-7)

These scholars knew Psalm 118 very well, it was in part a prophetic Psalm that pointed forward to the Messiah they all awaited and who they were confident would bring triumph over Israel's enemies! Their scholarly minds immediately recalled the Ps. 118 words... **"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this; and it is marvelous in our eyes. O LORD save us, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD...with boughs in hand, join the festal procession up to the horns of the altar..."** (Ps. 118:22-27) Many of them remembered... little more than 100 days before a spontaneous procession had developed on the Mount of Olives as Jesus came, riding on a donkey, in fulfillment of several prophecies, and the people had spread their cloaks on the ground and waved boughs of palm branches in the air.

The people had shouted these very words from Psalm 118 **"O LORD save us, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD..."** (John 12:12-15) On that Sunday, the Pharisees had become indignant and demanded that Jesus quiet the people and reject the adoration of the people. Instead, Jesus had challenged these very same religious leaders by saying to them: **"I tell you, if the people keep quiet even the stones will cry out!"** (Luke 19:39,40) Look around the room my friends... *it's a power showdown.* These religious leaders empowered by their education, their titles, their years of authority that caused the people to sometimes even bow when they walked by... and a simple Galilean fisherman who had spent months with Jesus, now emboldened by the Holy Spirit of God... nose to nose, glaring at each other, fists clenched!

Peter isn't finished! He raised his arm, fist clenched, and he shouts: **"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) The air seems sucked out of the room. These leaders are stunned, speechless. Their minds race for some rebuttal, but they find nothing. 72 Sanhedrin leaders, the most prominent, powerful men in Jerusalem, surrounded by many other religious leaders facing two Galilean fishermen stand frozen, unable to speak, unable to move. Time stands still. Finally, someone shouts *"Get Out! Take them out of here but hold them till we decide what to do with them."* Temple guards grab Peter and John and rush them out of the room, leaving these steaming men glaring at each other, befuddled, livid in their anger.

Let's pause right here friends. This is a historic moment. Nothing like this has ever happened in more than 1000 years of Israel's history! Something must be done, these fishermen cannot be allowed to continue their speaking, their teaching and making their preposterous claims about Jesus, all of which is shaking up Jerusalem! But what can be done? There's a power showdown happening here, and no one can deny the healed crippled man standing right in front of them!

Tomorrow we'll look at the historic decision these great scholar/leaders made about Peter and John. For today, just stand and watch them, and consider the power of what we've just experienced. Where does such courage come from? Of course, it was a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit upon Peter which guided his thinking, his words and awakened his great courage. *As we look around our world today, do you and I need such an anointing of the Holy Spirit? Are we facing great opposition to Jesus? Is Jesus calling us to stand courageously against the opposition in our societies?* Are you willing? Are you ready? What would need to change in you and me, for us to do what Peter did?

I wonder how many of you remember the "Promise Keeper" movement of the 1990's and those great stadium rallies? Did you attend at least one as I did? Remember the feeling of being surrounded by 70,000 men all worshipping our great God? Here's one of those great songs from those days that fits so well right here...

Today's Scripture is Acts 4:5-12.