

WEDNESDAY 15 June 2022 "Jail??" (Acts 4:1-4)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends around the world,

Have you ever been **arrested**? Ever spent a night or more in jail? If so, you'll never forget the desperate, nearly helpless feeling of incarceration, right? Looking out from behind those bars do you remember the emotions which rose up inside you? *Did you have that fleeting thought that you may never again see a day of freedom outside of that jail cell?* If you've never had that imprisoned feeling, perhaps you've had a similar feeling by finding yourself lost, I mean totally lost, without any way of discovering where you are. Or maybe you've been stranded on the side of a remote road alone without any communication?

Let's rejoin Peter and John in Jerusalem about 2000 years ago, surrounded by an agitated crowd who are trying to understand something they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, but they can't explain. A man crippled from birth is jumping and dancing and shouting with glee! *He's been healed by a power they cannot see or understand... Peter claims it is this man's FAITH in the name and person of Jesus which has healed him.* Peter had challenged the people to consider that a similar crowd in Jerusalem, several weeks before, had called for the execution of Jesus, and maybe some of those in this amazed crowd had also been in that violent, blood thirsty crowd! *Peter had explained God was willing to forgive their sins because in His sacrificial death, Jesus had paid the atonement price allowing God to forgive our sins!* Peter also made it clear God had raised Jesus from the dead and in that resurrection, God had made it clear **Jesus was the Savior for the world!**

Now that all sounds like wonderful news, doesn't it? And yes, many in that crowd were thrilled and responded to Peter's invitation, to repent of their sin and receive forgiveness from God and also receive what Peter next promised: **"Times of refreshing"** which we looked at yesterday. *But suddenly this peaceful scene of hope turned violent* and since you and I have seen so many out-of-control crowds as reported on TV and internet from all around the world in recent years, it should not be difficult for us to place ourselves in the picture that I find in Acts 4. **"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. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day!"** (Acts 4:1-3)

Watch out where you are standing, chaos has broken out. In the area of the Temple, perhaps something like in the Vatican in Rome, Temple guards had authority to quell any disturbances. Also, these Sadducees are one of two high ranking religious authority groups in Jerusalem, and they had the authority to challenge any religious teaching going on in the temple area. *So, while we might consider this arrest wrong, it was perfectly appropriate in that setting at that time.*

We don't know exactly where this jail was, but we can assume it was a first century, crude prison cell without any of the basic accommodations. It would have been a holding cell for any troublemakers in Jerusalem. Peter and John would have had no legal representation, no hearing, no options. *The jail cell door slammed behind them, and they had no idea how long they'd be there nor who would decide their fate!*

Occasionally as you and I are reading the Bible, the author gives us a commentary. Dr. Luke, the author of this book of Acts, does so with verse 4: **"But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about 5000."** What does it mean? What message? Was it really 'men' only? You'll recall Luke records a similar crowd to whom Peter had been speaking in Acts 2. That was on the day of Pentecost, perhaps a week or two, or more, before Acts 4. Luke gives us this account: **"Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized, and about 3000 were added to their number that day."** (Acts 2:41) Now we know Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims from all over the Roman empire for Pentecost, and these were the ones who recognized the languages spoken by the Holy Spirit anointed friends of Jesus, for it was their languages and dialects spoken in the far reaches of the Empire. I presume, therefore, that this miracle of languages was so amazing that a good number of those 3000 new believers in Jesus are pilgrims who then left Jerusalem, soon after Pentecost, to return to their far away homes.

But Luke also tells us in Acts 2:47 that **"...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."** So, I conclude that perhaps as fast as new believer pilgrims were leaving Jerusalem, other people in Jerusalem were coming to trust Jesus. Now here in Acts 4, a short while after Acts 2, another huge number of people respond to what they are seeing and hearing from the apostles, and the number of believers in Jesus reaches 5000 'men'. In those days, as today in many parts of the middle east, MEN participate in religious services and are counted in the tally of those who belong to any particular religious movement or even a local church or mosque or synagogue. To me that means 5000 MEN, plus women and children, who live in or near Jerusalem!

Now that's both a very rapid growth of this new Jesus' movement, but it's also a logistical challenge that is almost out of control! *Remember, these apostle followers of Jesus had no formal training, no strategic plan nor organizational structure!* They were 11 ordinary guys who had been with Jesus for several months and suddenly they were the experts on Jesus! Every day for them was filled with responding to the demands of hundreds of people who want to know everything about Jesus and all that He did and spoke about over the past nearly 3 years! Nothing was written down yet, no audio or video recordings existed. 11 guys who were now being pressured to answer every imaginable question people had about Jesus! Can you put yourself into the middle of this frenzy my friends? It was near mayhem! And now two key leaders of this group are in jail! I'm sure they are all asking... why? What now?

Why would God allow this to happen when they were all working so hard to do exactly what Jesus had told them to do? Does that happen to you sometimes?

Do things happen in your life that seem to be opposing all the good things you are trying to do? *Have you learned yet that what appears to be problems may in fact provide the platform for a miracle of God, and what appears to be opposition may in fact become great opportunities for God to do great things?*

Let's pause right here and walk around this scene looking at Peter and John in jail and the other apostles very confused and frustrated. Look at many of these new believers asking James and Matthew and Andrew and the others to explain *why Jesus was allowing the imprisonment of two of His best friends and leaders of this movement.*

And now look around your world. *Are there things happening that seem to be opposing God and all the good He is trying to do in your part of the world?* If God is Sovereign over all and God's overall purpose is that every person all over the world will have a chance to know Jesus, then what is God about to do where you live my friends? And are you ready to be part of a surprise from God?

Tomorrow we'll come right back and here and see what God did with Peter and John's night in jail! It was amazing, shocking! And it opened up a new wave of momentum for this new Jesus movement. *Also, it provided Peter and John a totally unexpected platform to proclaim some of the boldest statements about Jesus ever made, anywhere in our world.* I'll see you right back here tomorrow...

Today's Scripture is Acts 4:1-4.