

## Study following Sunday April 25th

**Prepare:** Think about the differences you see in the character of the disciples before and after the resurrection.

**Praise:** Spend time thanking God for the events of Easter, that Jesus died and was raised to life as the first fruits of the new creation.

**Passage:** Read Acts 4.5-12

**Ponder:** Our passage today comes a little earlier than the portrait of the new community of Jesus followers we saw two weeks ago. In Acts chapter 3 Peter and John healed a lame beggar and then continued to preach about Jesus in the outer colonnades of the temple, much to the disgust of the religious authorities. Peter and John are arrested at the start of chapter 4 and are put in custody. They are then brought before the rulers, elders and teachers of the law - the Jewish High Court or Sanhedrin, made up of 70 elders and the high priest. Peter and John were up in court, not for disobeying a civil law, but for preaching the resurrection - something a majority of the Sanhedrin did not believe in.

- Have you ever had to testify in court? Imagine how Peter and John may have coped with a night in the cells and then being hauled in front of the Jewish hierarchy.

Luke (the writer of Acts) mentions a number of names in verse 6 and we can imagine the first readers actually knowing exactly who these people were, they are certainly historical figures and all part of the same high priestly family that were given power by the ruling Romans. Annas had been High priest from AD 6-15 and was succeeded by his son-in-law Caiaphas. Annas stayed on the Sanhedrin and clearly seems to have the looming presence of an elderly statesman despite not holding office anymore.

- Do you think the presence of his father-in-law would have helped Caiaphas in his decisions and deliberations? See Exodus 18 for another father-in-law/son-in-law exchange as Jethro advises Moses about how best to lead the people.

The question they ask of Peter and John is very similar to the question they ask Jesus

- see Luke 20.1-2

After a night in the cell, perhaps spent praying for strength, Peter stands up and is filled with the Holy Spirit's power as he begins his defence. This is a fulfilment of Jesus' promise to the disciples, see Luke 21.12-15, that they would be persecuted but be able to stand firm and be able to bear testimony to Jesus. Peter skilfully links first the healing of the man in the name of Jesus, to the fact that they - the high court - crucified Jesus and yet God raised him to life. Peter then quotes from Psalm 118, pointing to Jesus as the rejected cornerstone. This was a psalm Jesus also quoted about himself - see Luke 20.17. Peter then moves from Jesus' name bringing physical healing, to Jesus being the name by which salvation is found - 'there is no other name...by which we must be saved'. Here is an echo of Jesus' own words: 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

I wonder how these statements sit with you? It appears so exclusive, and yet in another way it is also highly inclusive as it doesn't specify anything else is needed for salvation except trusting in Jesus. We are not required to behave in a certain way, be part of a particular tribe or fulfil certain criteria to receive salvation, just to believe in him.

**Pray:** Pray for all who are imprisoned for their faith, or those who have been shunned by their family or friends because of following Jesus. Pray for those who are working to help support persecuted Christians across the globe. Pray for ourselves, that we would know the guidance of the Holy Spirit when asked questions about our faith.

Stephen Partridge 2021 with reference to ideas from 'The message of Acts' Stott(1990).