

## Acts 4:1-31

### Threatened by the Jesus Story

#### 1. The Threat of the Jesus Story.

1. So far in all of our studies in Acts we have only seen positive reactions to the Jesus message. Even though Luke now records the first threats, persecution and negative responses to the Gospel he still wants us to know that many believed and that even though Peter and John are locked up for the night - The message of Jesus wasn't. Many who heard the Word believed and The number of Christians came to be about 5,000.
  1. After the religious leaders arrest, question and threaten the Apostles they let them go. Having no charge to hold them on because a notable miracle had been done and the people were praising God.
  2. But what was/is threatening about the message of Jesus? Peter and John were preaching - That Jesus is the true king of the World who is going to one day put everything right, as we saw last week. Now when they come before the religious leaders they claim that Jesus is not just the king of Israel he is the king for the whole world there is salvation in no one else; **“for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”**
  3. Peter and John make a very exclusive truth claim - Jesus is the one way of salvation - there is no one else. Many might hear this and think well of course they did because that's how people thought in those days. The crazy thing is they made this claim in a world and culture that was just as pluralistic (Many gods, many religions) as ours. (this fact actually caused the church much of it's persecution)
  4. The problem with truth claims is that they are very exclusive and divisive, even often oppressive. Our society tells us that no one should claim to have the ultimate truth. Society says, Christians can believe in Jesus but they should not say that Jesus is the only way or that he is better than any other religion leader.
  5. But one of the problems with this is that Jesus was the one that said these things and is the only "religious leader" that claimed anything like this. Jesus said - **"No one comes to the Father except**

**through me, Jesus said, before Abraham was I am,”and He who has seen me has seen the Father.”** No other religious leader in the history of the world comes even close to these claims. You also have to consider the kind of life Jesus lived, the person he was and the evidence of the resurrection. What you end up with is Jesus is either nuts and a megalomaniac and is then inferior to other religious leaders who are more humble, or he is superior, as he claimed. Whatever he is, he is not on the same level with other great religious leaders. Which means that if the Apostles believed and preached that Jesus was the only way to salvation then we have no right to change that claim now simply because we claim that the current culture is too pluralistic for an exclusive message.

1. On top of that, if you dethrone Jesus, you enthrone something, or someone, else instead.
2. The belief that ‘all religions are the same’ sounds nice and democratic - though a study of religions quickly shows that it isn’t true. What you are really saying is that none of them are more than distant echoes, distorted images of reality - claiming that reality, God, the divine is finally remote and unknowable.... which is just another truth claim and in the end you end up doing the very thing you are telling Christians not to do -to make an exclusive truth claim.
3. The Gospel is absolutely an exclusive truth claim, but consider the kind of truth claim that the Gospel is - A man (the God-Man) dying for his enemies. This is the most exclusive inclusive none oppressive truth in the world.
4. Listen to his words - **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**
5. Then there is the point of resurrection and the restoration of all things through Jesus being made by Peter and John.
6. What was it about this message which got the authorities, and others, so threatened and angry? Isn’t it great news to know that God was alive and had begun his ultimate rescue through the messiah? Not if you are already in power. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is a threat to every earthly power -whether religious or

secular, monarchal, dictatorial or communistic, republican or democrat. Resurrection has always been a radical, dangerous doctrine, an attack on the status quo and a threat to the existing power structures. Resurrection you see is the belief which declares that the living God is going to put everything right (as we saw in the previous chapter), he is going to restore all things, to turn the world the right way up at last.

7. Peter refers to Jesus as the stone which you rulers rejected having become the chief cornerstone. This is a quote from Psalm 118, but also what Jesus had said about himself... the implication is you rejected this building stone but through it/him God is building a whole new temple, a whole new humanity, a whole new creation and kingdom.
8. For first century Jews who were part of regular discussions about who the messiah might be and what he might do, the “stone” in this text would carry echoes of other passages as well. In Particular there is Daniel 2, which speaks of the ‘stone’ cut out of a mountain, which would smash to pieces the blasphemous statue of pagan empires and would itself become a kingdom filling the whole earth. The implication is clear. God is turning the world right way up and he is doing so through the powerful name of Jesus.

## 2. The Non Threatening Threat.

1. **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen**

**and heard.” And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.”**

2. The religious leaders are stuck - Because an outstanding miracle has been done, that no one can deny. Because the people are rejoicing and praising God. Theologically they have nothing to say, practically they cannot deny it, so they threaten. Remember this was a real threat. These are shrewd men of power. They were the ones who not many days before had lied about Jesus falsely tried him and delivered him over to the Romans to be executed. The threat is serious and real.
3. But how do Peter and John respond to this threat? With Boldness. They say, **“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”** They cannot, they will not be silent. So also, we cannot keep silent. Why? Because to keep silent or to adapt the exclusive message of Jesus to the current culture would be to leave people in their suffering and hopelessness, to leave people subject to the futility of the kingdoms and governments of this world. No politician, no president, no king can deliver like king Jesus! As we said last week our needs are deeper than social, physical or political. Our issues run much deeper. Our need is first and foremost spiritual. It is because of sin deep, within our souls that we are at war with one another, that we are at war with nature, that we are at war with ourselves, that we are at war with God and only the real Jesus, the biblical Jesus, the exclusive Jesus can bring that healing deep within us, only Jesus can bring us the kingdom of peace that can never be shaken in which righteousness dwells...
4. I would like to point out what Peter and John don't do. Look at the boldness of Peter and John. Look at their confidence. Yet they don't flaunt their power, they don't threaten when they are threatened. If Peter and John and all Christians for that matter are on the right side of history, a part of God's unshakeable kingdom; why aren't they triumphalistic, why aren't they overthrowing the Sanhedrin, and setting up God's kingdom.. Why doesn't the church overthrow

governments and such.. because this is not the way the church triumphs.

5. Jesus' people are not violent, threatening people. - As Peter would later write to the church suffering persecution, **"But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."** - 1 Peter 2:20-24
6. The Kingdom of Jesus is political but not in the way anyone thinks. Christ wins our salvation through losing, achieves power through weakness and service, and comes to wealth via giving all away. Those who receive his salvation are not the strong and accomplished but those who admit that they are weak and lost. The only way to truly follow Jesus is to admit that you are a sinner, that you have gotten it wrong, and to receive God's salvation by Grace - total and complete undeserved favor.
  1. This pattern creates an 'alternate community' in which there is a complete reversal of the values of the world with regard to power, recognition, status, and wealth.
  2. When we understand that we are saved by sheer grace through Christ, we stop seeking salvation in these things. The reversal of the cross liberates us from bondage to the power of material things and worldly status in our lives. The gospel creates a people with a whole alternate way of being human. Racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, yearning for popularity and recognition—all these things are marks of living in the world, and are the opposite of the mindset of the kingdom (Luke 6:20-26)."
  3. "The church is elected to responsibility, called to be the church to and for the world - not in order to save it or conquer it or even transform it, but to serve it by showing what redeemed human community and culture look like, as modeled by the One whose cultural work led him to the cross. In short, were sent out to be

martyrs, witnesses of the crucified one. In that way, we win by losing.” - Craig Hovey

### **3. The Prayer Under Threat**

1. The prayer and petition of the church - is not destroy our enemies; not, show them how wrong they are; not stop them; none of that.
2. They didn't pray for the threats or persecution to stop. The early church understood something that every generation of the church needs to understand - God places his chosen people amidst the warring and violent nations of the earth, as a sign of his coming kingdom, the sovereign rule by which he will eventually bring peace and justice to the world.
3. This is evident in their recalling of Psalm 2 in their prayer. This Psalm speaks about how the whole world is set against God and his anointed king and kingdom, and yet how they are powerless to threaten God's kingdom in any real way. God will triumph, he who sits in the heavens laughs at the threat; he has set his king on his holy hill. Nothing can stop the coming kingdom of God..
4. They simply prayed, Lord, consider their threats and grant us boldness...that we may go on speaking, and please continue to work powerfully... It says,“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

**Conclusion:** May God grant us the power and the boldness to live out the kingdom of God in our midst - a community where every man woman and child are valued - where every tribe tongue nation and people are seen as equally valued and loved by God. Where the poor and beggarly of the world are seated at the table with the rich and affluent. Where not just the “good people” can be saved and receive eternal life and forgiveness of sins but where “bad people” like you and me, can also receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Where no matter who you are and what you've done you can be forgiven and set free! May God grant us boldness to continue to live and proclaim Jesus, full of Grace and truth, the only name given among men by which we must be saved!