



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 4

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Introduction

In This Chapter We Will Explore:

- The beginning of the persecution against the church, and the reason for it
- The apostolic response to persecution, and continued progress of the church in Jerusalem

Sts. Peter and John Arrest (4:1-4)



- St. Peter and St. John taken into custody
- By the priests, captain of the temple, and the Sadducees
- The Sadducees - Whose whole system was now in danger by the preaching of the resurrection of Christ; for they believed not in the immortality of the soul, nor in any future world. These made a common cause with the priests, etc., to suppress the evidence of Christ's resurrection, and silence the apostles
- Kept overnight until the next day
- The number of those who believed came to be about five thousand
- While they thought to diminish the number, they actually increased it

Addressing the Sanhedrin (4:5-12)



- Their appearance before the Council (Sanhedrin)
- Before the rulers, elders and scribes
- Before Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, along with other family members of the high priest
- A meeting of the Sanhedrin, the great council of seventy, is meant
- These classes, with the priests named in Ac 4:6, constituted it
- The members of the Sanhedrin were usually called rulers; the elders were old men, selected for the place on account of wisdom; the scribes were the lawyers, or theologians

Addressing the Sanhedrin (4:5-12)



- St. Peter and St. John challenged to explain by what power or name they have acted
- They could not deny the miracle, but they thought that it had been done by some incantation
- They ask an explanation
- At that very instant, having received a fresh measure of the gifts and graces of the Spirit, besides what he had poured forth upon him at the day of Pentecost; so that he had great courage and presence of mind, and freedom of speech, as Christ had promised his disciples they should have, Matthew 10:18
- The case was much altered with St. Peter, he who but a little while ago was frightened by a servant maid, now stands before the Jewish Sanhedrim, with undaunted courage and resolution
- Honor should be given, to whom honor is due

Addressing the Sanhedrin (4:5-12)



- Observe St. Peter's point, that they are prisoners on trial for a good deed
- St. Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit, would have all to understand, that the miracle had been wrought by the name, or power, of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, whom that very court had condemned, whom they had crucified; and this confirmed their testimony to his resurrection from the dead, which proved him to be the Messiah
- St. Peter becomes the accuser
- They, his accusers, have been guilty of crucifying the Messiah
- They crucified him, but God raised him from the dead

Addressing the Sanhedrin (4:5-12)



- By your rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, you have fulfilled one of your own prophecies, Psalm 118:22; already made by our Lord Himself before some of the same "builders" (Mt 21:42), and, as one part of this prophecy is now so literally fulfilled, ye may rest assured, so shall the other; and this rejected stone shall speedily become the head stone of the corner
- Not only no other person, but no name except that divinely appointed one, Matthew 1:21, by which salvation from sin can be expected - none given under heaven - no other means ever devised by God himself for the salvation of a lost world
- All other means were only subordinate, and referred to him, and had their efficacy from him alone
- He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; and no man ever came, or can come, to the Father but by him

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)



- What the council saw the boldness of St. Peter and St. John
- They were perceived as uneducated and untrained men
- Uninstructed in the learning of the Jewish schools, and of the common sort; men in private life, untrained to teaching
- Realized as having been with Jesus
- In them the crucified Jesus stands before them, fearless as their Master
- What a testimony to these primitive witnesses!
- Followers of Christ should act so that all who converse with them, may take knowledge that they have been with Jesus

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)



- The man who had been healed
- Standing with St. Peter and St. John
- Against whose healing nothing could be said
- He was the unimpeachable proof of the miracle
- The miracle was so public, clear, and decisive; the man that was healed was so well known, that there was no evasion or subterfuge by which they could escape the conclusion to which the apostles were conducting them
- They sent them from their presence in order that they might confer freely together

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)



- A miracle has been wrought, and this miracle is known, and acknowledged to be such; all Jerusalem knew that he was lame – lame from his birth, and that he had long begged at the Beautiful gate of the temple; and now all Jerusalem knew that he was healed; and there was no means by which such a self-evident fact could be disproved
- Not the news of the miraculous healing of the lame man, but the doctrine and influence which these men preach and exert
- Nothing so ominous to them as the name of Christ crucified, because they themselves had been his crucifiers
- On this account they could not bear to hear salvation preached to mankind through him of whom they had been the betrayers and murderers, and who was soon likely to have no enemies but themselves

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)



- Commanded St. Peter and St. John not to speak at all or teaching in the name of Jesus
- Either privately or publicly, in the ministry of the word, or in working of miracles, in the city, or in the country
- St. Peter and St. John's reply by asking shall they listen to the council or God?
- As if they had said: Worldly prudence and a consideration of our secular interests would undoubtedly induce us to obey you; but acting as before God, and following the dictates of eternal truth and justice, we dare not be silent

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)



- They cannot but speak what they have seen and heard
- They are under a moral and spiritual obligation to speak
- They had a Divine message, and must tell it
- They had had so clear evidence that God had sent the Messiah, and they had received a direct and solemn command Mark 16:15 to preach the gospel, that they could not be restrained
- There was a necessity laid on them to preach, 1 Corinthians 9:16 Compare Jeremiah 20:9; Acts 18:5; Job 32:18-19; Psalm 39:1-3
- St. Peter and St. John released
- With threats, afraid to punish them lest they should exasperate the people

The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)



- Upon further threatening
- Finding no way of punishing them,
- Because of the people, who glorified God for what had been done
- Finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people—not at a loss for a pretext, but at a loss how to do it so as not to rouse the opposition of the people
- For the man who was healed was over forty years old
- The age of the man is mentioned to show the certainty and greatness of the miracle

Prayer for Boldness (4:23-31)



- St. Peter and St. John to their brethren and to report all that had been said to them
- This was properly the first persecution that had been raised up against the Church since the resurrection of Christ; and as the rest of the disciples must have known that St. Peter and St. John had been cast into prison, and that they were to be examined before the Sanhedrin, and knowing the evil disposition of the rulers toward their brethren, they doubtless made joint supplication to God for their safety
- Addressed to the Lord God, Creator of all things

Prayer for Boldness (4:23-31)



- All engaged in prayer
- It was a time of trial
- They were forbidden, under awful threats, to preach Christ (Ac 4:18,21)
- Hence they go to God
- We should neither be afraid of the threats of our enemies, neither yet foolishly condemn their rage and madness against us: but we have to set against their force and malice an earnest thinking upon the power and good will of God (both which we manifestly behold in Christ) and so flee to the aid and assistance of our Father
- God which hast made heaven and earth—against whom, therefore, all creatures are powerless

Prayer for Boldness (4:23-31)



- Who prophesied by the mouth of His servant David
- Of the nations' rage and plotting against His Christ
- Quoted from Ps 2:1,2. The predicted facts were all fulfilled in the trial and death of Christ. Acts 4:27 shows how they were fulfilled
- The Psalmist specifies more particularly that kings and rulers would be opposed to the Messiah
- This had occurred already by the opposition made to the Messiah by the rulers of the Jewish people, and it would be still more evinced by the opposition of princes and kings as the gospel spread among the nations

Prayer for Boldness (4:23-31)



- As fulfilled by Herod and Pilate, by Gentiles and Israel
- Who did according to His predetermined purpose
- It is evident that what God's hand and counsel determined before to be done was not that which Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, (Romans), and the people of Israel had done and were doing; for, then, their rage and vain counsel would be such as God himself had determined should take place, which is both impious and absurd; but these gathered together to hinder what God had before determined that his Christ or Anointed should perform; and thus the passage is undoubtedly to be understood

Prayer for Boldness (4:23-31)



- They do not ask to be saved from pain, persecution, or death
- There is nothing asked for themselves personally, but they ask
- That they may have boldness, in the face of threats, to speak the word
- That God would bear them witness by gifts of miraculous power
- Their prayer is all for the work's sake
- Through the name of His holy Servant Jesus
- The place in which they were assembled was shaken
- As a sensible evidence that their prayer was granted, and then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit as on Pentecost, so inspired that all fear was shaken off
- They spoke the word of God with boldness

Sharing in All Things (4:32-37)



- The multitude of believers were perfectly united as one body and with one life
- An example of the true Church, in which there is equal consent both in doctrine and in charity toward one another
- None claimed their possessions as their own; they had all things in common
- The language does not describe a community of goods, but a miraculous benevolence: (1) the goods were not a common fund, but each one had goods that he possessed; (2) he did not say that his goods were his own; (3) they used all as if it belonged to all; (4) there were none that lacked, for (5) those that had houses and lands sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles

Sharing in All Things (4:32-37)



- With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus and great grace was upon them all
- This power they received from the Holy Spirit, who enabled them with striking miracles, to give proof of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; for this is the point that was particularly to be proved: that he was slain and buried, all knew; that he rose again from the dead, many knew; but it was necessary to give such proofs as should convince and confound all
- None among them lacked what they needed for all who possessed lands or houses sold them
- They committed the money received for their property to the disposal of the apostles
- Distribution was made as each had need

Sharing in All Things (4:32-37)



- True charity helps the need of the poor with its own loss, but in such a way that all things are done well and orderly
- The example of Joses called Barnabas, son of Encouragement, by the apostles
- A Levite of the country of Cyprus
- Cyprus, the famous island of the Mediterranean
- He and St. Paul afterwards carried the gospel there (Ac 13:4)
- Sold land, and laid the money at the apostles' feet
- As a Levite, Barnabas would have rights in the Levitical possessions
- This is the first mention of this celebrated companion of St. Paul's missionary labors
- He next appears on a mission to Antioch (Acts 11:22)



Conclusion

- Why were the two apostles, St. Peter & St. John, arrested?
- Who were the judges for the trial?
- St. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. What is the meaning of 'filled with the Holy Spirit'? Did not the holy spirit descended on the disciples on the Pentecost?



Conclusion

- What happened inside the council after St. Peter's reply? What was the verdict? How did the two apostles responded?
- What did all the apostles do after the release of St. Peter and St. John?
- What were the characteristics of the first church? How did the life of coexistence begin?