



Signs of Christ-Centeredness

Series: Acts: Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 4:1-22

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Intro:

-Let's remember together what we saw last week. Peter and John had just been used of God to bring a man lame from birth to perfect health in the power of the name of Jesus. It was an amazing miracle physically but what was even more amazing was to see the parallel to the gospel and the total healing and reordering and transforming work that God must do to save a dead soul and make it alive in Christ. We can maybe grasp the physical because we can see it, feel it, touch it. But do we grasp the miracle of salvation in Christ? Are we in awe and wonder of who Christ really is and what He has done in our place personally?

-Peter was in awe because he knew Christ and His love in a very real way. And refusing any glory for himself, Peter gives all of the glory to Christ. Then Peter preaches boldly to the people the glories of who Jesus Christ really is. Peter set up the contrast between how the people had treated Jesus (they had delivered Him over and denied the Holy and Righteous One, they had killed the Author of Life) and how God had treated Him (God had raised Jesus from the dead and honored Him). And Peter confronts their sin and tells them that they are without excuse and calls them to repentance and to place their faith in Jesus because it's only in His name and in His power that healing and salvation comes. Peter was Christ centered beloved. The centrality of Christ was evident in his life and in the church.

-And we are going to see in this passage today some signs of Christ-centeredness. And as we look at these beloved, I want us to be encouraged by what we see. I want us to be strengthened by what we will see and let this drive us even more into Christ with a resolve that can't be squelched. I want us to leave here today so encouraged by what we see that nothing will stand in our way of Christ being central in our lives. I pray that

we will kill anything that comes before Christ. May God grant us repentance today and do just that. So let's begin.

1 – Christ-centeredness will bring opposition and persecution (1-7)

-“And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?”” (Acts 4:1–7, ESV)

-The Opposition:

-This passage tells us that as Peter and John were speaking the ruling authorities were greatly annoyed (strongly irked) by their teaching and took them captive. And just look at the class of opposition.

-Priests---These would have been the priest serving at the temple. There were chosen by lot to serve at a given time and would have been upset by the commotion that the miracle and the teaching was causing on their watch and the time that they got to serve. Riots on their watch, doesn't look good for them.

-Captain of the temple---this is the chief of the temple police. He was in charge of the temple guard and the second in rank only to the chief priest. The order of rank would have been the Romans, the chief priest and then the captain of the temple. That Luke mentions this shows the significance of this opposition.

-Sadducees---This was the upper class, the monied class so to speak. They had established close ties to the Romans. They were the dominant religious and political force in Jerusalem and most of the high priests during this period were Sadducees. They were control freaks and didn't want anyone rocking their boat.

-Rulers, elders and scribes---These would have been the teachers of the law and people in various positions of authority and men with great influence. They were probably Pharisees in their beliefs and would have been in the minority of the Sanhedrin as compared to the Sadducees.

-Annas the high priest---Annas was no longer the official high priest but was still considered so because of his influence. Once the high priest always the high priest. Kinda of like the President of the US---carry the title and somewhat the influence your whole life.

-Caiaphas---Caiaphas was the official high priest and the son-in-law of Annas which paints a picture for us to see how things worked.

-John and Alexander---This was not the apostle John but just 2 more men of high priestly families.

-Man, this is a lot of clout, position and power assembled together against a couple of fishermen. There is no discounting this---the opposition is great. So great that this would have seemed impossible to overcome in human eyes. These men of power assembling together showed the seriousness with which they viewed the teaching of Peter and John.

-The Issue:

-Why were these men greatly annoyed? What is it that disturbed them so much? 1 - That someone other than themselves were teaching the people would be enough to get them riled up. They were supposed to be the only ones that had the knowledge and authority to teach the people. For someone else to teach would be a threat to their perceived authority and weight. This was one thing that had bothered them about Jesus in the first place. He had not gone to their rabbinic schools but yet he had an authority that the people flocked to and now Peter and John were doing the same things. These rulers had killed Jesus but now they had this new group of people to deal with who had not been to their schools.

2 - They were also annoyed and disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Yes, the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection so we can understand their being annoyed but the Pharisees believed in a resurrection so why would the rest of the Sanhedrin join in with the Sadducees in being annoyed? You see, it wasn't that the teaching was just about the resurrection from the dead but the issue was that Peter and John were teaching of the resurrection IN JESUS. That changed everything. Jesus is the issue beloved. If Jesus has been raised from the dead, and you better believe that Peter has made it clear that He had been, then everything that Jesus had claimed about Himself was true. His being the Son of God was true, His nature and the value of what He came to do was true. And if Jesus is true then their rejection of Him is unfounded. And so they must stop this teaching in any way possible. So they use their tactic.

-The Tactic (3, 7)

-"And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening." (Acts 4:3, ESV)

"And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"" (Acts 4:7, ESV)

-Here we see the opposition employ the weapons of the world. They used their power. Think about it. The sense in the Greek of the words came upon them in verse one was that they did it suddenly. One minute Peter and John are teaching and the next they are being bombarded by power. And it was already evening and it was too late to convene so they just threw them in jail. They tried to intimidate them. They probably

figured that putting them in jail would make them think about what they are doing and that they would cool their heels in jail and be willing to cower down the next day. Yes, jail would have been intimidating, at least to me it would, but the next day they also put them in the middle of the most powerful men in Jerusalem and asked them the question, "By what power did you do this?" What they were saying is that we are the power of this town and we have not authorized this so where do you get off doing this without our permission. What they were saying is that if you are going to preach it's only going to be because we allow it. They were saying if we don't decide that you can continue doing this then you will not do it anymore, capiche!

-This is what the world tries to do with Christians and their message beloved. This is what the world will try to do to us if we are Christ-centered. Jesus said that the world hated Him and it will hate us. He said that the world persecuted Him and it will persecute us. Paul told Timothy that anyone who desired to live a godly life would be persecuted. Beloved, Scripture teaches us that we will be persecuted and there will be opposition precisely because we are disciples of Christ and we are not above our Master and that's what He received from the world. But be encouraged beloved by the promises of our Savior. Be encouraged brothers and sisters because the testimony of Scripture is that we will be blessed for being persecuted for the sake of Christ and His gospel!

-“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10–12, ESV)

-Persecution will come. We may not be put in front of the president or have our life threatened but it will come in some form.

-And when it does and we respond with Christ-centeredness we will be blessed beloved. It may not be physically in this lifetime but spiritually (refreshing times in the presence of the Lord) and our reward is great in heaven. Beloved, I don't know about you, but for me there is hope to be found here---hope that can give us strength to endure to the

end. Beloved, we find hope here that can allow us to rejoice and be glad of the suffering we face because of Christ and His gospel. Beloved, this hope can make Romans 5 a reality in our hearts and lives.

-“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (We have been saved and if God is for us who can be against us). Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings (James tells us that we can count it joy), knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:1–5, ESV)

-Really, rejoice in our sufferings? Christ-centeredness screams a resounding yes. Just listen to the words of EM Bounds about trials:

Trials must and will befall
But with humble faith to see
Love inscribed upon them all
This is happiness to me

Trials make the promise sweet
Trials give new life to prayer
Bring me to my Savior’s feet
Lay me low and keep me there!

-Beloved, the world thinks that it can stop the gospel by threats, force, imprisonment etc but it can’t. Why? Because the gospel is powerful!

C – The Power of the Gospel (4)

-“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.” (Acts 4:4, ESV)

-Many who heard the word believed! Even in the face of opposition and persecution the gospel prevails. These rulers were trying to stamp out the gospel but they couldn't do it. The more the church is oppressed the more it grows. God's hand will not be stayed beloved and we can trust that. No matter what kind or how much opposition arises, the gospel will prevail and Christ will have the reward of His suffering. Let that be fuel for the fight of faith to us. Find strength and encouragement in the power of the gospel that God has called us to proclaim beloved. Just think of your own salvation and the transformation that has taken place in your own life and trust God to accomplish that in others as you proclaim faithfully the gospel of Christ knowing that it is the power of God unto salvation. Proclaim it and trust it knowing that the world cannot stop its power.

-Do you believe that beloved? Christ-centeredness does and it acts on it no matter what the circumstances. And we see that next. We see that...

2 – Christ-centeredness will result in speaking boldly of Christ even in the midst of persecution (8-12)

-Before we read Peter's words I want us to think about his situation.

-You know it would have been easy for Peter to go into self-preservation mode. I mean think about it. You are standing in front of the most powerful men in the country and

they are staring at you waiting on a response. They have asked you a question and you can answer it with one word and be done and save your hide. It would have been easy for Peter to be intimidated and just answer Jesus and not worry about the possibility of getting the ax---or the cross. Think about what's going on in Peter's mind. He knows that these are some of the same men that Jesus stood before and they brought false accusations against Him and killed Him. These men are the ones that crucified Peter's Savior.

-This could have intimidated Peter but what we see from what Peter said it didn't. I'm sure the words of Jesus were ringing in Peter's head.

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:9–11, ESV)

-What Peter does instead is preach the same gospel that got him locked up in the first place. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, looks at these powerful men and comes to the conclusion that he will most likely never get this chance to preach the gospel to such an assembly again and so he goes for it man. They didn't want to hear about the resurrection of Jesus so Peter hurls it at them like a spear. They wanted to cling to their self-righteousness but Peter boldly confronts them with their sin and their rejection of Christ. Look at what he said.

--“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation

in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”” (Acts 4:8–12, ESV)

-We have seen the weapons of the world and its tactics for intimidation but now we see Peter go on the offensive in the power of the Holy Spirit. And what does he say?

-Peter shows them the **foolishness of being put on trial for a good deed** done to a crippled man, which should cause rejoicing. Seriously, we are being examined today because a man lame from birth has been healed and is now walking. Honestly, if that’s the issue then this is ridiculous. You can’t deny it but yet you won’t acknowledge it---what’s wrong with you. And if that’s not the issue then be man enough to say what your real issue is. If Jesus is the issue then be man enough to say it.

-Peter knows that Jesus is the issue with these guys. He has seen Jesus interact with these guys and how these guys treated Jesus. But Peter doesn’t back down. He is bold! And we here words from Peter that ought to be familiar to us by now. He uses the same formula again---It’s in Jesus name that this man is standing before you healed! The Jesus that you killed and the Jesus that God raised from the dead is the power and authority by which we do this.

-You rejected Him---and now He is the cornerstone. Peter uses their own Old Testament Scriptures again (Psalm 118:22) to confront their rejection of Christ. And their rejection of Him is contrasted again to the honor that God the Father gives Him. Christ has become the cornerstone. He is the only Son of God and He is the foundation of everything. And Peter tells them that they have rejected Him and that means that they are without hope.

-And see how easy **Peter moves to the issue of salvation**---even theirs. You see Peter’s heart is that he share the gospel with even these guys and they repent and believe. And there is no way that they can respond without their sin being exposed and to see their desperate need for a Savior. And Peter gives them clarity as to who the only Savior is. Only by the name of Jesus can one be saved. He is the only way of

salvation and that includes for you too Sanhedrin. How can Peter say this---because he knows that there is no one else like Jesus? Jesus is exclusively the only way to the Father. Jesus alone saves!

-That Jesus saves is not the issue today. The world will tolerate that. It's the fact that Jesus ALONE saves that is the issue. The exclusivity is the problem. It's harsh, and judgmental and critical and unloving and not understanding and it's hateful to the world. But Christ-centeredness does not budge at this point. No beloved, Christ-centeredness loves the truth and is bold to proclaim it no matter the consequences. Christ-centeredness is just that---it is centered on the truths of Christ and centered on His person and His sacrifice and His alone with repentance and faith placed in Him alone as the only way of salvation which will result in a changed person---period. Peter was very exclusive in the midst of a powerful worldly audience---there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. That name is Jesus and it is His power and His alone that heals and saves. It's Christ or nothing. It's Christ or judgment. It's Christ or hell. That's the truth beloved. Oh church, we must be Christ-centered and proclaim the gospel as Peter did. Proclaim the full gospel of Christ, boldly and faithfully, and trust God for the results. He alone has the power to save and bring dead souls to life. Trust Him and the power of His gospel to do just that! If you do that then the next thing we see about Christ-centeredness will be true of you.

3 – Christ-centeredness will be noticed (13-14)

-“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.” (Acts 4:13–14, ESV)

-These powerful men noticed Peter and John. Uneducated, common men astonished these men of power. Not that they were stupid or illiterate (they wrote Scripture by the power of the Spirit). These were not dumb men but they were

ordinary men who had not been trained in their rabbinic schools and they spoke with boldness and authority. And I don't know if the Sanhedrin immediately realized this or whether it came to them gradually as they were in this questioning but either way it was noticed---these men had been with Jesus! These men had been transformed! You don't commune with the living God in the flesh and not be changed! You don't commune with Christ in His word, you don't commune with Christ in prayer and with His body and not be changed. Beloved when you grasp the grace of God in Christ and you behold the glories of Christ, you will be changed and it will be noticed by those around you.

-And Peter and John were noticed by the Sanhedrin as having been with Jesus. But **what the Sanhedrin didn't know** was that the apostles were still companions with Jesus. He's alive! This relationship was not just a thing of the past. They were in communion with Him now. Jesus was in their midst still because He was in Peter and John. Alexander Maclaren said this, "A soul habitually in contact with Jesus will imbibe sweetness from Him, just as garments laid away in a drawer with some perfume absorb fragrance from that beside which they lie." In seeing Peter and John, the Jewish leaders were seeing Jesus! The Lord was saturating their emotions, compelling their wills, energizing their bodies so that the Sanhedrin was not only seeing them but they were seeing Christ!

Is this how it is with us beloved? Is our communion with Christ that real and that sweet that we are the fragrance of Christ to those around us? If we are Christ-centered beloved this will be true of us. It was true of this church in Acts because Christ was central in their lives individually and corporately.

And what was the response of the Sanhedrin?

-I think it very interesting that they had nothing to say in opposition (14). It's no mistake that Luke uses the word standing here in verse 14. It would have made the Jews think of the resurrection. In Jewish thought one who was dead would be considered to be one lying down but one who had been resurrected and alive would be standing. The Greek word for resurrection is anastasis, which means a standing on the feet again speaking of being raised from a lying position in the grave. The word that

Luke uses here for standing is a derivative from the Greek word for resurrection. The real issue was the resurrection of Jesus and they had nothing to say in order to refute it. They didn't even know how to address the issue and so they didn't. All they could do was put forth some threats which was a confession of their weakness. So threaten they did but in the midst of their threats we learn something else about Christ-centeredness.

4 – Christ-centeredness does not compromise (15-22)

-“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.” (Acts 4:15–22, ESV)

-The Sanhedrin can't deny what has been done. They would love too but they can't. And they have no defense to the real issue of who Jesus is and His resurrection---they have nothing to say. So what do they do? The only thing they can do when you have no defense or might is say offense. You use your perceived power to threaten and hope that works. And so that's what they did. They sent Peter and John out of the room, refused to acknowledge the miracle (couldn't deny it but refused to acknowledge it and embrace the power from which it came and so reveal their hard hearts) and decided to threaten them. They thought that since these men were uneducated and common that they could use their power to threaten them and it would work. They should have known by now that these men were different, and they may have, but this

was the only card they had to play. So they called Peter and John back in and charged them, threatened them to not teach in the name of Jesus anymore. And then they probably flinched as they awaited the apostles reply. And Peter and John do not disappoint.

-“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.”” (Acts 4:19–20, ESV)

-Peter and John must obey the commands of their Savior. It doesn't matter where the threats come from, they must be true to their Lord. Doesn't matter what they are told to do or by who, they will not compromise their loyalty to Christ. They will submit to their authorities as long as that submission does not cause them to disobey the Word of God but they will not submit at the expense of pleasing man instead of pleasing God. They have been saved by the blood of Christ and they will proclaim it no matter what because Christ has told them too. They will obey because they love Christ---He is their life and their treasure! They love Him above all else.

-And here we see that Christ-centeredness does not compromise beloved. Christ-centered people will always have a desire to obey Christ and please Him no matter what. Peter and John could have been killed with no questions asked because of their response but they didn't care. How about us? Are we willing to compromise for our own sake or for the sake of some false peace? Are we willing to compromise because it's easier? The opposition that we face could come from the very people that we love most. If so, will you compromise because it's family? The very day may come when preaching Christ and the exclusive nature of salvation in Him will be considered a hate crime and we may be instructed to not preach and teach and proclaim it. What will we do beloved? If we are Christ-centered then the answer is easy---we will obey the Lord and not man. But what about right now? Is your heart centered on Christ and His word? Is Christ central in your life? Do you have a resolve to not compromise?

-Peter and John gave the answer that the Sanhedrin probably expected because all they did was threaten them some more and let them go finding no way to punish them. And in this we see their confession of weakness compared to the power of the gospel of

Christ. The people were praising God for what had happened. An amazing miracle had taken place—the man was over 40 years old. The people were praising God and I pray that we are too---for the miracle of our own salvation. This is what Christ-centeredness does beloved!

5 – Application

-Are you Christ centered?

-If so know that persecution will come but rejoice and be glad. Be encouraged that you will be blessed for it and that God deems you worthy to suffer in the name of Christ for the gospel. And know that your reward in heaven is great and that through your sufferings God is faithful to use it to conform you even more into the image of His Son, Jesus. And if persecution and opposition will make us more like Christ because that is what He experience then let us say with boldness and confidence, "Bring it on!" and enjoy the times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord.

-Are you Christ Centered? If so, are you bold to speak of Christ?

-You can be beloved. The words that Jesus spoke to the disciples then still apply to us today. We don't have to worry about what to say because the Holy Spirit is our helper.

-“When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Matthew 10:19–20, ESV)

-“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”” (Joshua 1:9, ESV)

-Are you Christ-centered? If so, do people see a difference in your life?

They should be loved. Think about it. The Holy Spirit indwells us and Christ is in us. We are united with Him and He is our life. Our life is hidden in Him. This will be noticed. And be ready to do what Peter did. Be ready to heed Peter's words to us.

"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect," (1 Peter 3:15, ESV)

-Honor Christ be loved and give a defense for the hope that is in you.

-Are you Christ-centered? If so, is there a resolve in you to never compromise? Will you speak to please God and not man?

-It is my prayer that we as individuals and as a church will never compromise. Let that be forged in us right now today. If you are tempted to compromise then think of the cross and what Christ has done for you be loved---and stand firm to the end. Because if we don't stand firm in faith, we will not stand firm at all!

-Be Christ-centered be loved, be Christ-centered! And may Christ be all to us!

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