



## **Expansion: The Story of the Early Church (Part 9) – Before the Sanhedrin**

Jason Harris – 10 October, 2021



Good morning. Good to see everyone here this morning. I'm glad you've chosen to be with us to hear the word and to worship God as we celebrate this Sunday and would love for you to stay for lunch afterwards, if you have time to do so as well. Let's go ahead and go to the Lord in prayer as we begin.

Father, we thank you this morning for the opportunity to come before you and your word and to hear you speak. We thank you that you have brought us safely through this week. We thank you that even in those ways in which we have not come safely through this week, there is grace; that your wrath and your punishment does not rest on your children, but rests on your son, Jesus Christ, at the cross. May we, this morning, come before you in worship, in hearing the word with these truths fresh in our hearts—that we are accepted, that we are loved because of Jesus Christ. Work now, we pray, by your Holy Spirit. Do in us the things that need to be done. For your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Two weeks ago, and the week before, we began in Acts chapter three looking at this incident that takes place in the temple where a disabled man becomes enabled to walk through the ministry of Peter and John in the name of Jesus. And we noted in those texts the astonishment of the people, the people are amazed to see this happen. And we talked about the awe emergency that this presented as the people begin to focus on the apostles and the amazing thing that they have done and begin to miss the thing that it was supposed to point them to. That is the name of Jesus. Jesus, who was dead is not dead. He is alive and powerful.

In our text today, the early church experiences its first serious opposition. In Acts chapter 4, verses 1 through 4—which we looked briefly at last time—we saw a contrast between two

kinds of people and their response to Peter and John's preaching in explanation of this miracle that has taken place... this healing... Two responses. The first one is found in verses 1 through 3, where we see that some rejected the message and of these, those who are most religious and most powerful, uh, resorted to force to silence the message they rejected. They arrest them. But in verse 4, we saw another response and that is faith. Belief. Many are added to the assembly of believers.

But our text today focuses in on that first group of people. Those who did not believe, and indeed sought to silence the message of Jesus Christ. And so in our text today, verse 5 through 22 of chapter 4 in Acts, we see Peter and John's bold testimony in the face of opposition from elite and powerful people.

We're going to start in verse 5, we'll read verse 5 and 6 together as we begin. Verse 5 says, *"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."* Now we know from verse 3 last time that even though they arrested them, they could not have a hearing at that time. It was already late. We remember they got to the temple at 3 o'clock, did the healing, and then they spent time explaining this to people. So by this point, the Jewish day is over. It's evening. And so the, um, the rulers, the chief priests cannot do anything at that time of night because the law did not allow it. Now we remember that six odd weeks earlier, um, that did not stop them from having a midnight trial for Jesus. But this does not seem to be so serious at this stage and so they have put back on their veneer of pious upholders of the law again, and: "we're not going to do that."

So here they are. Um, they put them in prison. The next morning, they get together as a Sanhedrin. This is the official, uh, governing body of the Jewish people. They aren't really able to govern because they are owned by Rome, but they are still allowed to assemble and they're given some powers, uh, to sort of maintain the local peace. And so it's an important point here that I want us to notice in verse 6, that these people named here—Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and Annas—these are the high priestly family. These are the same guys who conspired no more recently than six weeks, but it could have been perhaps more—several months perhaps, but they recently conspired to condemn Jesus to death. It's the same guys. Next morning, they get up. They assemble their Sanhedrin and they're back at their wicked tricks.

Verse 7, *“And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’”* So, the Sanhedrin sits in this sort of a semi-circle. And so you've got them sitting in a semi-circle and they say they take Peter and John, they bring them in, and they're sitting in the middle. So it's gotta be a little bit intimidating to kind of be surrounded by this Sanhedrin sitting around you, but here they are. They're brought into the Sanhedrin and they are asked, really two questions. They want to know by what authority they did this. And then also by what power they did this. So this has to do with the ability to do it. “How did you make a guy who can't walk, walk?” But also authority. “Who gave you the right to do that?” That's kind of where the Sanhedrin's head is in this. So verse 8, we go on, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders,’” He begins his address.

So Peter again takes the lead. Last time he took the lead. We don't know exactly why, but between him and John, Peter seems to be the talker here. And his response is breathtaking. This is some of the best rhetoric you'll find in, um, human speech in my opinion. It is just incredible, brief speech. He goes from verse 8 through to verse 12, and gives this response. And notice here that the Holy Spirit is playing a crucial role. What Peter is about to say is not easy to say and, uh, Luke makes a point of saying, “Remember, he's filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is making it possible for him to do this.” He is going to address the leaders of the nation. This is like standing before parliament. This is the very body who recently killed Jesus Christ, and he's going to do it in a situation where they want to silence him. They've arrested him with no charges because they want him to shut up. Later, it's going to tell us they want to punish him. Now, we're not just talking about, you know, give them a fine. When, when the Sanhedrin punishes people, it can lead to death. Like, it's serious business. These people are scary. And the Holy Spirit is giving Peter the guts to face this situation with boldness.

And the truth is we will face situations like this, where it is not easy for us to stand up and address the situation boldly, courageously, plainly, truthfully, and simply. And the beautiful thing is we have the same Holy Spirit of God helping us. We are not just people on our own sort of sent out to do this thing and just: “pull yourself up by your bootstraps.” We have help in the Holy Spirit. This is—we talked about Pentecost—this is what's so amazing. God is with us. We have help. We're not on our own. And Peter is enjoying this reality as he stands in this crisis moment.

Verse 9, the text goes on. This is Peter speaking now to the Sanhedrin. He says, “If we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this

man has been healed,” and he's going to go on, but I'll stop there for a moment. He, he sets it up. If. And it's true. Okay? So what he's saying is, “We are being examined today concerning a good deed that we did to a crippled guy.” Peter begins by saying, “Let me just clarify... The reason I'm here is 'cause I helped a guy. We healed a guy. He was crippled 40 years, and now he's up walking, dancing around, jumping in the temple. Let me just clarify that.” That's Peter's start. This is a radical reframing of the story from what the Sanhedrin has created, has done. The Sanhedrin acted like Peter and John have done something wrong. Right? That's what ha— That's the implication of, “Hey, you're under arrest. You've done something wrong. You are the bad guy here.” Um, they dragged them into court and he stands up and his first words are to just completely reframe reality... uh, sorry, reframe the story, the narrative around reality... what's true. “Here's what's true. We did something really good. And that's why you arrested us.”

Um, the implication of this for, for Christians is pretty significant. Um, we are not required to just sort of take whatever twisted, perverted way of thinking, or framing, or narrative that is fed to us. In fact, as lovers of truth and lovers of the light, we're supposed to be the kind of people who look at a situation and say, “No, here's what's really happening. Here's reality.” And Peter and John don't feel like, “Oh, we gotta, we gotta be nice. We've got to play along with their game. Well, we're Christian so we're supposed to be... you know, we're not supposed to be too, too sarcastic or too edgy or too pushy, or, you know...” No, no, no, no. “You guys, here's how it happened. We did a really good thing and you arrested us for it.” Just reframes the whole thing back to reality. He's not harsh. He's not sarcastic. And he isn't looking down on these people. But he does speak the truth simply even though it sweeps away their entire twisted way of thinking.

Verse 10, he goes on. He says, “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.” So they've asked a question that Peter and John have already answered very clearly and very publicly. Remember back when they first healed him, he says, “I don't have money, but here's what I do have: in the name of Jesus be healed.” Right? In the name of Jesus. Anyone who watched it happen knew exactly what was happening, but if that's not enough—because, you know, some people didn't see that event because nothing amazing had happened yet—but when he goes into the temple and he's walking and he's jumping and he's dancing around with joy, then they all come out to Solomon's porch and Peter again spends, like, a really long time explaining exactly what's happened, and why it's happened, and what it means. Right so Peter and

John have not, like, been hiding this. There's like, "Well, how could we possibly know?" "Well, I spent a long time telling you. Oh yeah, you arrested me halfway through it." That's what's going on here. Um, so their attempt to cast the shadow of suspicion on what Peter and John have done is absurd. And Peter brushes aside any notion of secrecy or shadiness by addressing this. "All you guys. Oh, and by—look, the whole nation. Let everybody in the world know here's where we stand." So he's just crystal clear. Nothing is being hidden. There's no shame here. There's no secret here. There is no conspiracy. Here. It is. Point-blank. Verse 9. "You asked me by what means did you do this? Here's the answer. Jesus is the means. Which Jesus? Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Crystal clear. Simple. Direct.

But he goes a point, uh, a step further because he points out as he says this—Jesus is the means—he points out three things. Let's just... I'll run them through you... run them by you. So, the first one is Jesus is the Christ. "*Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*" We think Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Oh yeah, he was raised in Nazareth so that makes sense. Just an objective description. It's not. If Peter had said Jesus of Nazareth, no problem. You realize that there are almost no historians in the world who don't recognize that Jesus of Nazareth was a guy who existed. What people don't accept is that he was the Christ prophesied thousands of years before. And so Peter isn't content to say, "Jesus of Nazareth did this." He says, "Jesus, the Christ, did this." Jesus is the Christ. Number one.

Number two: "You guys crucified him." And number three, "God raised him from the dead." "By what means did we do this? By the means of Jesus, who is the Christ, who you killed, who God raised." The thing that... if we just kind of get the vibe here of what Peter is responding... he's like, "Guys, Jesus did this. Remember him? Remember that Jesus guy? Remember, you know that 'God's Messiah' guy that you've been waiting for for thousands of years? You spend your whole life studying all the prophecies about him? Remember him? Yeah, him, him, that guy... yeah, you guys know... The guy you crucified the other day. Yeah, that guy. And remember the guy that God raised from the dead? Yeah, that guy. He did this."

And as if that is not full on enough, he goes on in verse 11 to say: "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." Seems a bit—what's he talking about a rock? They knew exactly what he was talking about when he said this. Okay. Here's Peter: "Remember how that Psalmist back in Psalm 1:18 that you've read a thousand times, and had all your classes about, and wrestled about, and argued about, and read about...? Remember how it talks about how the builders reject a stone that turns

out to be God's cornerstone? Uh, you're the builders. You're the builders who reject the stone that God accepts as the most important stuff. And Jesus is the stuff." Here's what he's saying: "When you read your Bible and you saw this story and with the good guys and the bad guys, you were the bad guys. You're the builders prophesied to reject God's Christ. And Jesus? He is the Christ you were prophesied to reject. The Bible's talking about you. This is intense. This is intense! Peter just puts it right there. "Read your Bible. Open up Psalm 1:18. Alright, those words... that's not talking about, like, you in general, like, you're the people who would do that. When he said builders, he had specific people in mind and it was you. Let me show you from your Bible why you're the bad guys in God's prophetic story. Like, there's you, and there's Satan, and there's the demons. Like, you know, you're the bad guys who passionately, systematically pursued the destruction of God's purpose and plan in the world. You.

Verse 12, Peter goes on: "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." Here's, here's... "You're the bad guys. You're the bad guys in God's story of the whole human race. You're the bad guys and if that's bad news, the news gets worse. You killed God's son, Jesus. And the only one who can save you from God's wrath at you for that, is Jesus." Like, talk about an awkward moment. You killed God's son and your only hope for mercy and rescue from that, is God's son. I hope you've been nice to him. Oh, wait...

Peter could not be clearer about the options for humans to be rescued from God's curse against sin. Could not be clearer. There is salvation in no one else. No other name. "Well, that's for the Jews." No... "Under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." You must be saved and there is one way to do it: Jesus Christ. Not optional. This is core Christianity. Jesus alone can save us. Jesus is our only hope. This is radical. It's radical truth that has driven thousands of Christians over the years to change everything about the way they live. Everything. Because there's just one option for getting rescued. One. And that is Jesus Christ. This changes everything about how we think and live.

Peter says, "You killed him. Now run to him for mercy." Think, think about this. This is intense and it is condemning, but it is also incredible grace. "You killed God's son and God is willing to rescue you. God is willing to save you. Not just, you know, like you inherited the sin, not like your ancestor... You did it. Here. Six weeks ago. You voted to crucify Jesus. Send him to Pilate, insist upon his death. You. And he's perfectly willing to rescue you. Here's what you need to do. You need to run to him as the Christ. There's mercy even for

you, but you only get it by going to the scene of the crime. That's it." What a courageous confrontation and what a terrifying thing to stand before those who want you deleted and say the truth so plainly... when the truth is this.

Now beginning in verse 13, we see the response of the leaders of the Sanhedrin. Verse 13. *"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."* The text here says that they noted specifically the boldness of these guys. These guys spoke with a spirit and planted conviction that what they said was true and they were authorized by God to say it. And the leaders know that this is not the confidence of a legal education or a theological education. These guys are common men. No, this is something else. What they saw here: this boldness, this courage, this confidence, this conviction was so distinctive, so unusual, and so unique that they just knew whoever these guys are they've been with that Jesus guy. They knew. They're like, "I've seen this before. I've seen someone come out of the populace... just a guy out of some small country town, hasn't been to our universities, hasn't hung around in our parties, hasn't... Just nobody. Just a common guy. And they're standing here in front of the Sanhedrin just nailing us with prophecy, with Scripture, with truth, with courage and boldness that's just astonishing. "We've seen this before. This guy's been with that Jesus."

There's something really impressive, really amazing going on in that insight, in that comment, "This guy's been with Jesus." Um, our time with Jesus changes us, shapes us. It affects us. It gives us clarity and focus and boldness and courage and conviction. Indeed, it gives us a willingness to die for some things. That's what happens when you spend enough time with Jesus. It just shapes you. And it's not just about time 'cause remember six weeks ago (or perhaps more), um, Peter was there too. Peter was there and he wasn't bold and he wasn't courageous. And yet something about the process—and I suspect it's the cross, the gospel combined with Jesus kind of finishing up his teaching, bringing it together, and then the Holy Spirit coming in, just empowering it—and Peter is transformed.

But here's the thing. When we say that being with Jesus changes you, it's not some sort of a magic formula. Like this, it just magically changes you. No, this is actually a fairly common concept, like peer pressure. Um, our time with anyone changes us. You don't spend a lot of time with any person without beginning to be shaped by your time with them. You, you are different because you spent time with them. You are molded into their ways of thinking. You are challenged. You are directed by them. This is something we know that we are influenced

by the people we hang out with. This is why I would say to us at CrossPoint, I want to see every single one of us spending time in the word of God regularly. Often. I'm not going to give you, you know, a rule you need to do this, you need to do it every day, you need to do it, blah, blah, blah time. I'm not... But I am going to say, we need to spend a lot of time with God in the word, in prayer, in meditation, in worship... A lot of ways that can happen, but we need to spend a lot of time with God. Because doing so is shaping for us. It, it takes people like Peter, who's just an ordinary bloke and doesn't know a whole lot, and is really kind of really foolish in a lot of ways, and it gives us, gives him, this rock solid conviction where in all of human history, God chooses this guy to stand up to his killers and say, "Hey, you're the builders." And, and he can do it without rancour. Just plain and simple. Puts it out there. Terrifying simplicity. "Jesus Christ, whom you crucified and God raised."

And you notice his message to the people on a porch and his message to parliament—no different. He didn't take off the edges. If anything, he put the edges on. If anything, he was more clear, more direct to those in power, to those who had actually made the decision, He does not wimp out on the message.

Verse 14, the text goes on, "But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition." Here's Peter. He gives this speech. It's full on and he finishes and they're like, "We have nothing to say." Okay? Because here's a guy standing next to him. What did he say? "Well, Jesus did this and there's a guy." I mean, it's really... Um, again, it's just one of those incredibly awkward moments when you have to argue while the cripple who was dancing around the temple is standing here, right? Like, it's just a really awkward situation. Like, "that's not true." Look, what do you say? Like, you're standing there. Like, jump. What do you do? So they're like, "we have no answer" And so they decided to confer privately.

Verse 15, we'll read down through 17. Now this section we'll take together. *"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.'"*

Now, now I would say to us, welcome to the minds of perverted, evil men. So we're just going to spend a few minutes in the mind of twistedness. This is how wicked men think.

Number one in verse 14, they have no answer. They don't have an answer because the guy's standing there, living proof, demonstration of everything that Peter said, but they don't stop to think about what is true and right and real. "We don't have an answer." But they don't stop to think, "Well, what does that mean? What is the right answer? If Peter's answer is not right, what is the right answer?" They don't stop and think about that. Instead, they turn to tactics. "We're going to confer privately, send them out." They're cowards. They're cowards, They're gutless cowards. "We don't have an answer, but hey, we'll, we'll get out of this situation tactically." Well, what is the answer, guys? "We don't know. We don't care. That's not the point." And what we saw back in verse 2 that their motive was they said, "These guys are teaching the people." Who gives them the right to teach people? We're supposed to teach the people. And here's the worst part: they were teaching resurrection. "We don't believe in the resurrection. You don't get to teach people resurrection." Well, the guy's standing there and he was raised by a guy that you killed. But, you know, I had dinner with him recently, he's alive. So this is a really messed up, awkward situation, but do they care to find the truth? Not interested.

But here we are verse, verse 15 through 17, they admit—"Look, a notable sign has been done by these people. We can't deny that. They did something impossible to do, and they claim it was through Jesus." But not for one moment do they stop and ask, "Well, how do we need to change our lives in consequences of this? What are the implications of this? What if Jesus really is the Christ? What if this pile of impossible things is God saying, "Hey, listen to me." No, in fact, the only reason they mention it, the only reason they bother... Read verse 16. This is scary. *"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."* The fact that they cannot deny it and that everyone can see it is all that bothers them. It does not matter to them that it's true. It doesn't cross their mind. It's true. No, what they care about is "Everybody saw! And how do we deny it? We don't have, we're not..." This is literally... In their wicked minds, this is a PR problem. It's a PR problem. Well, what about the truth? "Who cares about the truth? We're losing influence here. We're losing power. What happens if we lose and the Christians take it?" What? This is how these men are thinking. This is pure evil.

And yet, how often is this a perfect mirror of the Christian Church in our day? The Christian Church. When something happens, something goes wrong, we're not thinking maybe they're right. What is true? Let's be good. We're thinking, "Oh no, we're in the press. Look at our reputation. We're getting hurt here. We got to shut this thing down. We got to silence these

people.” Christian leaders acting like this. This is, this is an evil that is part of our way of thinking. And we... God will not tolerate it. And if you think this way, you walk in darkness and you do not love the light. I don't care if you're a Christian, have been for 40 years, Christian family, I don't care if you're a pastor... If you think this way—“This is a PR nightmare.” “Yeah, but somebody got hurt.” “Yeah, but look at the reputation of Chr—no, no, no, I don't care about your reputation.”—If you think that way, you walk in darkness. You do not love the light. And so these wicked cowards confer in secret and conclude that there's nothing much they can do for now. They'll be back, but “not a lot we can do. We're stuck in the PR crossfire.”

Verse 18. “So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” And so what they're basically doing is offering Peter and John a truce. “Here's the deal, guys. If you will keep your mouth shut about Jesus, we'll leave you alone. Look, if you've got to heal someone, that's fine, but don't talk about Jesus. Don't go around teaching people as if you have authority. We're the boss around here. That's it. And if you'll respect that, we're just going to pretend this didn't happen and send you home.” How many Christians have been offered this truce over the years? Over and over and over and over again when persecution hits, people offer this truce. “If you're willing to just shut up about—and then they'll fill in, but ultimately it will often boil down to the gospel—then we'll leave you alone.” And if, what they say to shut up about is just our political views, then excellent, good call. We'll just focus on Jesus Christ and him crucified. But if what they say is, “Don't preach in Jesus' name, don't teach in Jesus' name, we're in trouble now.”

Verse 19, this is where we see Peter's response to this offer of a truce. He says, *“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.’”* Peter's, Peter's response here is actually kind of hilarious. Okay, just get into the text here, the logic of it. He's like, “Hey, hey guys, before we go, could we just, could we just grab some advice off of you? Um, I understand you guys are like pretty big religious leaders. And we have this scenario where we've got a bunch of guys saying, do this, but then we've got God saying, do that. And we're just wondering, did you have any thoughts on that dilemma? Like what, what do you think we should do? Should we follow, should we follow these guys? Or God? How 'bout you be the judge.” It's possible that Peter is actually quoting Socrates. Just over 400 years before that, Socrates—he's standing before the court that condemns him to his death and he actually says these words—he says, “Men of Athens, I respect and love you, but I shall obey the God rather than you.” “Um, I've got a higher calling and you're a religious

leader, so do you think I should follow you or do you think I should follow God?" He just... Like, what are they going to say? "No, no, no, follow us." He's got them in this silly situation that demonstrates their silliness, their sinfulness.

But the point is simple. Peter and John have long since made up their minds that they will obey God, no matter what. They know that it might cost them their lives. This choice might cost them their lives, but they've sorted it out in their hearts... sometime after the cross. Particularly Peter. He's not clear at the cross, but at this point he's very clear. We're going to obey God no matter what. So must we. They have a sacred duty to testify to the things they have seen and heard. And so do we.

It closes in verse 21 and 22, *"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."* See, they want to punish Peter and John. They want to hurt them. They literally want to injure them. But they can't. It would be absurd. It would be absolutely absurd in every way. Just... there are no charges, that... everything that's happened in this trial, in this hearing has demonstrated it would be absurd. They haven't done anything wrong, they healed a guy. But that doesn't bother them. They don't care that it's absurd. They'd still hurt them. What bothers them is people know. "Everyone's out there praising God and if we punish them, then we look bad. So..." They don't care that it's absurd in reality. What they care about is it will hurt their power and their influence.

And Luke points out, "Hey the guy's over 40 years old." In other words, this guy's been there for a really long time. A whole lot of people have had conversations about him, chatted about him. This is the hot gossip in Jerusalem. This is going around. You can't, you can't punish the guys who healed him. You can't do that. It's not going to work. And that's what bothers them. And so they do a politically expedient thing. They let them go with few more grumbled threats. Literally, Peter's like, "I can't, I can't do that." They're like, "Well, if you do... Now get out." It's pathetic really.

God willing we're going to look next Sunday at how the believers respond in private. This was kind of how they respond publicly. Next week we'll look at how they respond in private. But for now, we rejoice in this Holy Spirit driven boldness with which we can testify to the grace of God in our lives, even in the face of great opposition. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the boldness, the courage of Peter and John that day as they stood and they spoke the truth without bending it. We thank you for men all throughout history who have had the conviction to stand up for the truth when it mattered. We thank you for the Holy Spirit who helps us to do that in our lives at crucial moments and when it matters. I pray that we will be courageous. That we will be people of conviction. That we will, um, we will be discernibly different, discernibly marked, by our relationship to Jesus Christ, our risen living Saviour. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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