

Called to be Bold Witnesses to Christ

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[0 : 00] I trust you were listening to that reading read by Izzy, the appointed lesson for this morning. But in order to fully understand what is taking place, we need to go back to chapter 3.

Now, excuse the teaching, but this is important. We read there in Acts 3 of the story of the healing of the crippled man, this man who had never been able to walk, who sat and begged at the gate of the temple, of the gate called Beautiful.

And he was there as Peter and John were approaching in order to go to prayer, the house of prayer, the time of prayer, 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

He thought he looks like some rich pickings, and so he asked them for money. And then we get those famous words uttered by Peter, silver and gold I haven't got any, but what I have got I will give to you.

In the name of Christ, stand up and walk. He'd been a cripple for 40 years. But Peter wasn't content with just saying it.

[1 : 18] He put out his hand, gripped the right hand of this man, and hauled him to his feet. In the name of Christ, walk. You can read the full story, if you want, in Acts 3, verses 1 to 10.

This is your after-lunch reading. It was this event, it was this event, and Peter's subsequent speaking to the people, which came to the ears of the high priest.

And that meant trouble. Because the high priest and the other members of the Sanhedrin were concerned. I think that word is an understatement.

They were not just concerned, they were blinking angry. They were concerned, very concerned. According to one commentator, the Sadducees were the principal instigators of the persecution of the early Christian church.

They were the ruling class of wealthy aristocrats, and they were not to be fooled with. Theologically, they believed that the Messianic era began in the Maccabean period, so they were not looking for a Messiah, which excluded Jesus, of course.

[2 : 37] They also denied the doctrine of the resurrection, which the Apostle proclaimed in Jesus Christ. Thus they saw the Apostles as agitators, heretics, disturbers of the peace, and enemies of the truth.

In their eyes, they were troublemakers. So they were greatly disturbed. Well, if you were in their shoes, you would be, wouldn't you?

All that you stood for was being contradicted by these men. For this was unauthorized preaching by unprofessional preachers.

That was the gist of the matter. So here we have the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees, coming to confront Peter and John.

And because it was late in the day, Peter and John were arrested, no charges laid, thrown into prison for the night. But Luke assures us that the opposition of men did not hinder the word of God.

[3 : 52] The Sadducees could arrest the Apostles, but they could not arrest the Gospel. On the contrary, we are told that over 5,000 men believed and decided to follow Christ.

And that was the upshot of the things that the Sanhedrin had to deal with. The following day, Peter and John were brought from prison to appear before the Sanhedrin.

Do you know what the Sanhedrin was? We'll just pause for a minute and put yourselves in Peter and John's shoes. The Sanhedrin is the highest court in the Jewish system.

It was made up of 71 members and it was presided over by the high priest. So it was an almighty, august body. The highest court in the land.

And they were the people that administered justice. As they sat in their customary semicircle, Peter and John were brought before them.

[5 : 04] What was going through Peter and John's minds as they stood before that body of people?

I can imagine that they were casting their minds back because Jesus stood before the Sanhedrin and he was condemned and they were dead. What was the man's mind? Was history about to repeat itself?

Were they to suffer the same fate? Were they to be handed over to the Romans and be crucified? Surely such questions must have entered their minds.

In this situation one would have expected the apostles to be awed, overstruck, dumbstruck even, cowed by the sheer grandeur and enormity of the situation.

Struggling to find the right words to respond to questions but not so. Not so. The court begins with a straight question. By what power or what name did you do this?

[6 : 13] And they were referring of course to the healing of the crippled man in the previous chapter. Peter's response is breathtaking in its audacity.

He addresses the Sanhedrin as though he were preaching to a crowd of people. He gave scant regard to how important they were.

The fact that the high priest was there he didn't give a jot. Rulers and elders of the people she said. If we are being called to account for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed then know this.

Know this that you and all the people of Israel that it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified. crucified. I'll bet that brought them back on their heels.

Whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead that this man stands before you healed. So where did Peter get his courage from?

[7 : 21] This boldness this utter boldness to actually attack the Sanhedrin with his words.

And the answer is to be found in the early words of that lesson read by Izzy. Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them rulers and elders of Israel filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

and it is the living power of that same Spirit which gives to Peter the strength and authority to speak as he does. Note this that he takes no credit to himself.

He doesn't say anything about himself. It is by the power of Jesus that this crippled man has been healed. He Jesus is the stone you builders rejected which has become the capstone salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. This was boldness in extreme measure to accuse the Sanhedrin to literally blame them for the death of Jesus in my humble view was a very risky undertaking yet it worked.

[8 : 48] It worked. The members of the Sanhedrin if you'll excuse the terminology they were gobsmacked. They didn't know how to respond. They were completely taken off guard and so much so that they had Peter and John removed so that they could discuss among themselves what course of action they should take.

In the event they decided that there was little or nothing they could do. so they called Peter and John back in gave them a dressing down and told them to go on their way not to speak in the name of Jesus and after further threats they let them go for they could not decide how to punish them. What has all this got to do with our thinking this morning about being called to be bold witnesses to Christ? I don't think we're being called to replicate what Peter did although some of us may be I don't know.

I want to suggest first of all that being bold for Christ has nothing to do with preaching. Now Clive may disagree with me there but let me explain a little bit further.

It has nothing to do with preaching. It is however much to do with our lifestyle and the way we behave. People take much more notice of how we live than what we say.

[10 : 20] Some wise person said years ago preach the gospel and if necessary use words. I remember when I was in Sunday school it's amazing how these things come back to you more years ago than I care to remember but I learned this ditty.

we are writing a gospel a chapter each day by the things that we do not the words that we say. In other words people are looking at how we live the things we do not what we say.

But this does not mean that we have to be silent about our faith. On the contrary it means that what we say has to be backed up by what we do. The important thing to remember is that Peter was able to do what he did not in his own strength but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And for us that same power is freely available. All we have to do is to invite the Holy Spirit to take charge and then whoopee off we go.

So what are the challenges for us this morning? How can we become bold witnesses to Christ? What can we do that will show our willingness to be spirit-filled and do those things that will bring honour to our Lord?

[11 : 41] Let me tell you a story. It's perfectly true but this is boldness in action. A little while ago I attended a meeting at Westbury on Trim organised by LPMA, that's the Local Preachers Mutual Aid Association, that's a mouthful, and one of the guest speakers was the Reverend Dr John Newton and he was speaking on the subject of social justice and he recalled an incident from his youth which had influenced him deeply.

He told the story of a shopkeeper in the town where he lived who leased his premises from the local council. This shopkeeper was under pressure to surrender the lease so that the man who owned the shop next door could buy it from the council and extend his premises.

Whether there was any underhand dealing or not, John Newton never said but the whole thing was turning a bit nasty with pressure being brought to bear on this shopkeeper to surrender his lease. So, in order to diffuse the situation the council called a public meeting so that the whole affair could be explained and discussed. That was their mistake. And it was to this public meeting that the young John Newton went with his parents.

The whole affair was duly discussed with the pros and cons put forward by the parties involved. Members of the council were there in force because they wanted to support the motion that this man should be ousted out and the property sold to the chap next door.

[13 : 19] They were all in favour of selling the lease to this chap. until that is an elderly local preacher who had been an elderly member of the council who had been silent until then got to his feet and he berated the members of the council.

He gave them a tongue lashing and he could not understand what they were thinking about doing this underhand deal. And before he sat down he said this is parting shot.

This whole affair stinks. It has about it the mark of Naboth's vineyard. Methodist local preacher bringing scripture into the equation to boost what he was saying.

Here was a man of principle prepared to stand up and be bold and counted when it was necessary. And for those who are not familiar with the story of Naboth it can be found in 1 Kings 21 and tells of the underhand dealings of Jezebel.

Oh, there we go. The underhand dealings of Jezebel who had Naboth murdered in order that her husband King Ahab could take over the ownership of the vineyard.

[14 : 40] This thing stinks. It has about it the odour of Naboth's vineyard. Needless to say the council lost.

They did not win. Principle in today's life has now been overshadowed by political correctness. And we fear to challenge wrong in case we are accused of meddling, meddling in matters which should not concern us.

And it is this fear, this fear of being bold, or attempting to be bold, that allowed Jimmy Saville, Rolf Harrison, Stuart Hall, to get away with years of child abuse.

Because those people in the know were frightened to speak out. We dare not speak of the wrongs being perpetrated in the name of faith in case we are accused of racism.

I dare to suggest that there is a need for Christian folk to stand up and be counted, to be bold for the Lord's sake, to go into those situations and to be and to do what Christ is asking.

[15 : 53] And in a sense, it is all wrapped up in one sentence. We are called to live holy lives.

This thing which John Wesley was so keen on, scriptural holiness, holiness, that holiness should invade every part of our being. It means that we are Christians seven days a week, not just on Sunday mornings.

Our faith should influence everything we do, everything we say, every action. And then perhaps when we have achieved that holiness, we can be bold for Christ's sake.

and the Holy Spirit, the giver of that strength, he will be there to lead us and guide us and help us and enable us to be bold witnesses for Christ.

In his name, amen.