

God is Sovereign in Jesus' Mission

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[0 : 00] As we begin, I just want to give you a little lesson in power. So in engineering terms, power is measured in kilowatts or volts or horsepower.

But just for today, what if we measured power in units of Trump? So Donald Trump, most powerful man in the world. Let's measure power in units of Trump.

So the US government, one Trump, one unit of Trump. Xi Jinping, which has taken me all morning to practice. Xi Jinping of China, the president of China.

I'd say 0.9 of a Trump. What do you think? Maybe, maybe the same. 1.1. Doug says 1.1. Yeah.

What about our leader, Scott Morrison? 0.1 of a Trump, I think, if he's lucky.

I think we're only a small little island. 0.1 of a Trump. In our passage today, we meet the full Sanhedrin. That is the Jewish ruling council. There's 71 members, all led by the high priests.

[0 : 58] They dictated a life in Israel. They held the keys to God and the temple. They are two Trumps for sure. And they are about to give the apostles a lesson in power as well.

You see, in chapter 1, verse 8, Jesus promised that his witness will go from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. But already the mission is in danger of not clearing that first Jerusalem hurdle.

Because for the first time in Acts, Jesus' mission faces powerful opposition. This week, it's powerful opposition from outside the Sanhedrin.

Next week, powerful opposition from within as Satan himself comes to attack. For us here in Australia, we are thousands of miles away from that sort of religious violence.

And we're thousands of miles away or thousands of years ahead of Acts chapter 4. Or are we? You see, I think there is a powerful form of secularism at work in Australia.

[2 : 07] It seeks to remove Jesus from the public square. Maybe not violently, like in other countries for sure. But still enough so that we shrink back.

So that we become timid. Too timid to share our faith. Speak publicly about Jesus. And if you think I'm overreacting, how do you think the local government meeting or the university faculty or the workplace HR or even the family barbecue would go if you said you agreed with verse 12?

Look over the page of verse 12. Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. I think this might be one of the biggest claims in Christianity.

It's very exclusive. Notice the two negatives. Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name. It's a universal claim that all other ways of salvation are wrong.

So Islam and its five pillars. The Hindus working on their karma. The atheist who only believes in the physical world. They're all wrong. Just try agreeing with verse 12 and see what the people out there do to you or how they treat you.

[3 : 28] And this sense of opposition scares me enough to never speak up. Or maybe I'll say that Jesus is a way of salvation but not the only way as verse 12 says.

What are we supposed to do when opposed by power? Well Acts chapter 4 is a lesson in power. So that scared and embarrassed Christians like me will be bold in a society like ours.

So please keep your handouts there. And please keep Acts chapter 4. You'll need to be able to see it a lot today. We're at point one. Seven weeks earlier the Jewish authorities had fired or given Jesus their best shot.

They arrested him. They tried him. And they crucified him. And so they were greatly disturbed when in verse 2 the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

What's more, last week Peter and John were performing a Jesus only miracle. They healed the lame man. And so the Sanhedrin's worst fears are being realized. Jesus is back.

[4 : 39] His mission is continuing. And they were sad you see. Sad you see. Sad you see. I'm allowed to make a dad joke, aren't I? There you go. But the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, they have the power.

And so in verse 3 they seize Peter and John. They throw them in jail. And it's Jesus' trial all over again. And all the same players are there. Verse 5. The rulers, the elders, the teachers of the law, they're there.

Verse 6. Annas the high priest. Caiaphas also are the members of the family. It's the full Sanhedrin. It's the Jewish senate and priesthood. It's church and state all rolled into one.

They have the home ground advantage of Jerusalem and the temple. Very powerful. They are two units of trump up against what verse 13 says is two unschooled and ordinary men.

They killed Jesus seven weeks ago. Now Peter and James are going to get a lesson in power as well. Let's see what happens. Verse 7. The Sanhedrin had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them.

[5 : 47] You see, in our passage, powerful people witness a real display of power when the lame man is healed. And they're scared that their position and their status will be taken away.

And they ask, by what power or what name did you do this? In other words, by whose authority or who are you acting for when you healed the lame man?

Our passage today keeps mentioning Jesus' name again and again. It's in verse 10 and verse 12. It's in verse 18. It's in verse 30. What is it about Jesus' name that suddenly ends a conversation or invites hostility?

It's easier to say, I go to church or I believe in God. But mentioning Jesus' name and everything gets suddenly weird. And I think the answer is, he is the issue.

Opposition centers on Jesus and the claims that he makes. See, powerful authorities versus weak Christians, it seems like an easy victory.

[6 : 55] But that is until verse 8 turns the tables. Verse 8. Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit. This is point 2.

So verse 8. Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them, rulers and elders of the people. If we're being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and have been asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel.

See, just as Jesus' spirit enables a lame man to walk, so it empowers an apostle to boldly defy this authority. Verse 10.

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

The word is saved. See, Peter is saying, you and God think very differently about Jesus. You crucified him, but God exalted him, raised him from the dead.

[7 : 56] Last week, you crucified him, but God glorified him. You think very differently about Jesus. That's what Peter says. Verse 11. He says, Jesus is the stone you build as rejected.

And there, the more eagle-eyed amongst you will know that he's quoting Psalm 118, but he changes it ever so slightly. And so please, Charlie, on the screen. So on the top, that is Psalm 118, and on the bottom is Peter quoting it.

Can you spot how Peter has changed the psalm? Can you spot it? Next slide, Charlie. Next slide. And then go back again.

And then forward. And back. And forward. And back. Can you see it? Peter has narrowed his eyes at the Sanhedrin. Jesus, the stone you build is rejected.

That's what he says. See, thank you, Charlie. That's fine. You see, Psalm 118, it's an illustration about God's building the temple. That's where you could meet him, where forgiveness of sins was possible, where forgiveness of sins was possible, and where membership of his people was counted.

[9 : 09] The Sanhedrin, they were supposed to keep it solid and secure. They were supposed to build up the temple. But when they came across Jesus, they said, nah, he doesn't fit our scaffolding.

He doesn't match our plans and designs. And so they rejected and they crucified him. And that fulfills Psalm 118. You see, they forgot the other part of the prophecy.

The stone you build is rejected, has become the cornerstone. You see, when you would build a building back then, you had to get the right cornerstone to start.

The very size and shape of the cornerstone, or the foundation stone, determined what the rest of the building would be. You see, maybe the Sanhedrin wanted to build God's temple on the cornerstone of their own power, and their own religious superiority.

The picture in verse 11 is that God has brushed off the Jesus stone and brought it back to life. In other words, God is building a totally new temple, a totally new future.

[10:20] And that means Jesus is now the place where we meet God, where forgiveness of sins is possible, where membership with his family, and of course, eternal life is found. On Jesus, God is building a new future, which is why, verse 12, salvation is found in no one else.

For there is no other name under heaven, given to mankind by which we must be saved. You see, the true measurement of power isn't, of course, it's not units of Trump, but it is actually units of salvation.

Verse 12 says, there is no other name by which we are saved. And actually, it says, by which we must be saved. You see, people don't need a bit more church on Sunday, or a few more good morals.

Verse 12 says they must be saved. And they might argue, yeah, sure, the lame man, he must be saved, and I must have financial security, and I must have good health.

But must be saved by Jesus? And they're scratching their heads. And that is probably our fault. Because we Christians, we're pretty good at being quiet about God's judgment.

[11:37] The fact that all people will one day face his opinion on their lives, that is something we have kept to ourselves. But the Bible is very clear.

So, Charlie, please, the next slide. This is just further in the book, Acts. I think the language is very clear. He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. Very clear stuff. Thanks, Charlie. In the creed which Naomi led us through earlier, there's a line we always say almost every week.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. It's very clear. If you are not a Christian, which will be a few of you in the room, please take this very seriously.

You must be saved by Jesus. Otherwise, you are not saved. In the coming months, in the lead up to Christmas, Andrew, Price, and I, we're going to be running some workshops to help you share your faith with your loved ones.

[12:37] In a couple of weeks, on October 20, we're going to have a prayer meeting straight after the service, like we did a couple of months ago. Again, specifically designed to pray for loved ones who are not saved to be saved.

We're trying to squeeze every bit of juice out of Acts that we can. For the Sanhedrin in our passage, the obvious thing for them to do is to admit they got Jesus wrong.

Maybe they could repent and turn to God for forgiveness. That's what more than 5,000 people in Jerusalem had done so far. But instead, the must that they did do is verse 17.

We must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name. Verse 18, they commanded them not to speak. Verse 21, they threatened them.

And their opposition, I think this is really interesting, their opposition isn't a problem of evidence or logic or understanding. Verse 14 says, they could see the man who had been healed standing.

[13:44] Verse 16 says, we cannot deny the sign that has been done. It's not a problem of evidence. The issue is a lack of humility.

They're too powerful to humble themselves before Jesus' name and before his apostles. And so God uses two unschooled and ordinary men to give them a lesson in power.

And verse 14 to 21, the Sanhedrin appear weak and impotent. So at the end of verse 14, it says, there was nothing they could say.

They were too embarrassed to speak in front of these two men. And so in verse 15, they order them to withdraw so they can confer together in private. Verse 16, what are we going to do with these men?

Verse 19, Peter and John replied, which is right in God's eyes to listen to you or to him? You be the judges. Peter is mocking the fact that this whole council of judges don't know, verse 21, or can't decide how to punish them.

[14:50] Verse 18, then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. And Peter basically says no. He basically flat out refuses. Verse 20, as for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Here is the whole Sanhedrin, the power of the day, two units of Trump, we said, but Jesus' spirit empowers two ordinary men to make them look weak and impotent again and again and again. And the reason why is they have rejected the cornerstone and they don't know point number three. Point number three, that's verses 23 to 31.

It's essentially a prayer. I'll be briefer about this one. Peter and John, they're released back to their friends and they all get together and pray as one. The main note of their prayer is that God is in control.

Look at verse 24. Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. See, this verse is great because it reminds timid Christians that any opposition we face is something God made or controls.

[16:09] Verse 25, Peter quotes Psalm 2, which is our Old Testament reading. It says, why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

Psalm 2, it predicts how authorities will treat God's king when they meet him and that's exactly what happens in verse 27. It talks about Pontius Pilate and Herod and others conspiring against him. But verse 28 shows real power. Look at verse 28. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

You see, not only did God predict opposition to Jesus, but he uses it against them. That is real power. Sanhedrin, they may just be two units of Trump, but how many units is God? Infinite, I guess. The apostles, they know this, which is why they aren't praying that opposition will end. But instead, verse 29, please look at verse 29.

[17:21] Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. God answers their prayer, verse 31. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Notice, as the buildings start to shake, the apostles become more unshaken. It doesn't mean they are trouble-free. It doesn't mean everything will be easy.

For us here, we might lose a friendship. We might lose a promotion. Maybe even a family member along the way. It doesn't mean we'll never be scared.

But will we be bold enough to open our mouths and share our faith? I think this prayer, it's a model for timid and embarrassed Christians.

It reminds us that God is in control, that even when opposition comes, he is sovereign enough to use it against them for his own purposes. In Psalm 2, there's a really great verse.

[18:25] It says that Jesus laughs at authorities that oppose him. It says he scoffs at them. It's a great verse. Imagine, if you can, that our worst fears are realised and in 50 years it becomes illegal to talk about Jesus out there and also in here.

Our children and our grandchildren, they need to know that God's king laughs at powerful opposition. Scary to us, scary to them, but God's king scoffs at them.

See, to him, they're like a little Lego man, a little plastic Lego man. You stupid Christians, stop talking about Jesus. Funny to us but even funnier to Jesus.

He scoffs. He laughs at them, even the things that are scary to us. And maybe all of Melbourne won't honour Jesus' name.

Maybe 5,000 people won't come into our church next week. But it won't be because Australian authorities were too powerful for God. It won't be because God is less sovereign in certain suburbs and it won't be because he was sleeping on the job.

[19:45] Actually, it might probably be because we were too timid and embarrassed to speak up. So, when the opposition or the social awkwardness comes, the first thing to ask yourself is, do you believe verse 12?

Will you believe it for your loved ones, your family, your friends? And secondly, will you pray? I realise lots of you can't get out and about to share your faith.

Maybe some of you at home or sick, some of you work from home. Prayer is the application for you. Clearly, all of us are weak and embarrassed.

The opposition looks scary. But will we trust that God is sovereign enough, that he's in control enough to be able to use that opposition for his own purposes, just as we see in Acts chapter 4. He loves to answer prayers like verse 29. So, this week when you get up, think of all of the people you love who don't know Jesus.

[20 : 53] And then say verse 12 for them, salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to the Henderson family, given to your family, by which they must be saved.

And then say the simple prayer of verse 29, sovereign Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. boldness so that our loved ones would call on Jesus' name and be saved.

In his name we pray. Amen.