

Peter and John Arrested
Acts #6 | 4:1-31
September 20, 2020

Pre-Sermon Remarks

1. Personal: I've missed you, will be in Spokane on the 27th with Sojourn Network
2. Acts: this is part 2 from last week. RECAP.

PRAYER

Introduction

At our house, we have a Christmas decoration, blocks to count down the days. I've been thinking about getting it out to count down the days until the election is over. Only 44 more days!

- This is an incredibly political passage! Messianic/king language, clashes with gov't, civil disobedience, public opinion and pressure...it's all here!
- **Politics:** *polis*, meaning "city." Public life, how we live in groups of people. *Plato's 5,040*
- The disciples started having their political categories rearranged starting back in Acts 1.

Restoring the Kingdom?

Acts 1 ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

- Jesus is not going to "do politics" according to their understanding
- As they learn, they find themselves at odds with the government, first of many to come!

Big idea: Being a part of Jesus' kingdom rearranges our political priorities and sometimes puts us at odds with the powers of the day.

When persecuted, these disciples: 1) preach, 2) persevere, and 3) pray

*But first, a little...perspective.

Living in Two Kingdoms

1. Christians are part of the kingdom of God
 - a. **Luke 8:1** [Jesus went] through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.
 - b. **Colossians 1:13** He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.
 - c. **Hebrews 12:28** Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.
2. Christians also live as citizens of earthly kingdoms
 - a. Subpoint: earthly kingdoms have legitimate authority over our lives
 - b. **Daniel 4:17** The Most High is ruler over human kingdoms. He gives them to anyone he wants.

- c. **Romans 13:1** Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God.
- 3. Christians must learn how to navigate the overlaps and the tensions
 - a. Subpoint: the two kingdoms are not one and the same (Holy Roman Empire) nor are they 100% separate (Anabaptists). Rather, they overlap and have tension
 - i. Example: theft could have legal ramifications, but also church
 - b. One day, they will be one and the same! | **Revelation 11:15** The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.
 - c. For now, we have to learn how to navigate | **Luke 20:25** Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.
- 4. The Christian's primarily allegiance is to God's kingdom
 - a. Subpoint: where there is conflict, we go with the Sermon on the Mount, not the constitution. The gospel re-orders our priorities.
 - b. Personal story: pledge of allegiance to American flag, Christian flag, Bible

Commotion in the Public Square

¹ While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them, ² because they were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. ⁵ The next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family. ⁷ After they had Peter and John stand before them, they began to question them: "By what power or in what name have you done this?"

- Political language: temple police (authority), Sadducees (political party different from Pharisees), rulers (generic term), scribes (journalist/lawyer), elders (local gov't), high priestly family (aristocrats)
- Question: "by what power or by what name (authority) have you done this?"
- These leaders recognize that this is no mere healing. It's a sign that points to Jesus as King

I. Preaching

⁸ Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders: ⁹ If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, ¹⁰ 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 and whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing here before you healthy. ¹¹ This Jesus is **the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone.** ¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved."

- Peter does not say, "hey we were just trying to do a good deed." Instead, he preaches about the **GOSPEL**: life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is how we are saved.
- Quotes from a very political, Messianic psalm, 118 | Our liturgy for today!

- Psalm 118 ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. ⁹ It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. ¹⁰ All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!...¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.
 - These disciples are actively learning to put their trust in the Lord, not rulers

On Preaching the Gospel

- In the book of Acts, there are three words that are translated as “preach”
 - κηρύσσω (kerusso) official announcement, public declaration, proclamation
 - παρρησία (parasia) outspokenness, confidence, boldness, fearlessness
 - εὐαγγελίζω (evangelizo) proclaim good news
 - Not used: “share” | In the book of Acts, it’s more forceful, urgent, passionate
- In Acts, we see these “big” moments. BUT, did all 5k (vs. 4) men hear Peter directly?

Justo Gonzalez The ancient church knew nothing of “evangelistic services” or revivals.”
 ...Evangelism did not take place in church services, but rather, as Celsus said, in kitchens, shops, and markets. A few famous teachers, such as Justin and Origen, held debates in their schools, and thus won some converts among the intelligentsia. But the fact remains that most converts were made by anonymous Christians whose witness led others to their faith...Another surprising fact about the early expansion of Christianity is that, after the New Testament, very little is said of any missionaries going from place to place, like Paul and Barnabas had done. It is clear that the enormous spread of the Gospel in those first few centuries was not due to full-time missionaries, but rather to the many Christians who traveled for other reasons—slaves, merchants, exiles condemned to work in the mines, and the like.

II. Perseverance

¹³When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus.

- Education is great, Holy Spirit power (vs. 8) is far better

¹⁴And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵After they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶saying, “What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign has been done through them, clear to everyone living in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But so that this does not spread any further among the people, let’s threaten them against speaking to anyone in this name again.” ¹⁸So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; ²⁰for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹After threatening them further, they released them. They found no way to punish them because the people were all giving glory to God over what had been done. ²²For this sign of healing had been performed on a man over forty years old.

- The leaders’ conundrum: yes, this disrupts their power, but the community is blessed
 - How I long for this for our church! Oh, to be known for this kind of benefit!

On Civil Disobedience

1. The general principle is that government has legitimate authority, so we should follow
2. There will be times where the two kingdoms don't align, so go with God
 - a. Hebrew midwives in Egypt, Rahab in Jericho, Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael in Babylon, Peter and John in Roman-occupied Israel.
3. Be really, really careful where you draw that line | saving lives, loyalty to God

On Perseverance

Two pastoral concerns

1. Some of you will fight over secondary, minor, unnecessary things
2. Others of you will give up far too easily when things get hard

Luke 9 ²³ Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me will save it. ²⁵ For what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world, and yet loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and that of the Father and the holy angels.

III. Prayer

²³ After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them.

- Worship God the Creator

²⁵ You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant: **Why do the Gentiles (*nations*) rage and the peoples plot futile things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers assemble together against the Lord and against his Messiah.**

- Worship God from Scripture | *Quoting from Psalm 2*
- Worship God as Trinity | Holy Spirit, Lord, and Messiah

²⁷ "For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place.

- Worship God as sovereign ruler

²⁹ And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, (*parassia*) ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

- Two requests: 1) people to be bold, 2) God to do amazing things

³¹ When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

Prayer is more important than you or I could possibly know

Questions to Ask Yourself?

1. What would it look like if you really understood your primary political allegiance?
 - a. Do you say “Jesus is Lord” in a *spiritual way*, or have you bent your knee and surrendered to the true King of kings?
 - b. How much attention do you give to American (other) politics?
 - c. On election day, if your guy doesn’t win, will you feel more sad than over the people in your life who are destined for eternal damnation?
2. What would it look like for you to *proclaim* the gospel?
 - a. Where do you need to grow in boldness? Where do we need to turn up the knob of “the priesthood of believers” instead of just relying upon leaders to do that work?
3. What would it look like for our church to be a redemptive presence in our community?
4. What would it look like if our church prayed with conviction and Holy Spirit power?

Conclusion

Nations will rise and nations will fall. America is not the promised land, but we have been called into a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let’s pray, let’s persevere, and let’s proclaim the good news.

Benediction | Taken from 1 Timothy 6:15-16

Jesus is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

Sermon Description

In Acts 4, Peter and John face political consequences as a result of their healing ministry and their preaching ministry. When faced with persecution, these disciples have a chance to evaluate their relationship with the politics of the day. In this evaluation, they respond with perseverance, with prayer, and with bold proclamation of the gospel.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you articulate the differences between “sharing” the gospel and “proclaiming” the gospel? What would those differences look like in your own personal relationships with non-Christians?
2. How does the gospel of the kingdom fundamentally rearrange our relationship with earthly politics? Are you more prone to political apathy, or over-engagement?
3. How can we help one another persevere in the faith in spite of what feels like a tsunami of pressure from our culture? How do prayer and perseverance work together?
4. What would it look like for our church community to make a deep, meaningful, redemptive impact in our community? Where is God leading you to that type of involvement and engagement?

Prayer Points

1. As you pray, let the example of Acts 4:24-31 shape your prayers: worship of God as creator, Trinitarian prayer, praying the Scriptures, asking for boldness, asking for Spirit power, etc.
2. Pray for God to make us prayerful, persevering Christians who boldly proclaim the gospel whenever we have the opportunity.
3. Pray that our church would be a redemptive presence in our community, even when we disagree with the prevailing culture.

For Further Study

- [A Tale of Two Kingdoms](#) blog post by Michael Horton