

Acts: Verse-by-Verse Study Notes

Acts 4:13-22

- **The Marks Of Jesus' Apostles: v. 13**

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus."

1. Common Men – Uncommon Courage:

This is a definite change from just weeks before these events when the apostles sequestered themselves, fearing arrest by the Roman authorities.

What made such a change? I'm going to suggest that it was their experience on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus promised them an empowerment for witness.

2. Common Men – Uncommon Arguments:

The Council realized that Peter and John were ordinary men and unschooled ("*agrammatoi*"), meaning "unlettered" or "illiterate". It's the root from which we get the word grammar.

Barclay's translation: "When they saw how boldly Peter and John spoke, and when they had grasped the fact that they were men with no special knowledge and no special qualifications, they were amazed; and they recognized them for men who had been in the company of Jesus. "

What the Council meant by "unschooled":

1. Peter and John were not trained in Greek rhetoric – as in public speaking. Peter asked the Council whether it was right for them to obey God or the Council's demand that they not preach in Jesus' name.

Greek philosophers often stressed the idea of obeying God rather than people, as well as following truth rather than social convenience.

2. "Unschooling" could mean that Peter and John were not trained under a professional rabbi. In Jesus' day, the popular Greek philosophers insisted that they were not educated in rhetoric and lived simple lives.

3. Common Men – Uncommon Mentoring:

"They were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." Peter and John were "educated" by Jesus. He, too, was uneducated by Sanhedrin qualifications, yet he was bold and able to thwart their best attempts to trap him theologically.

- **Nothing The Council Could Say: v. 14**

"But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say."

Just like the crowd in the Temple courts, the Council could see before them the uncontested evidence of the man's healing. They couldn't deny the miracle, but they also couldn't acknowledge the source of the miracle.

Verse 15: "So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

Liberal theologians and Bible critics have argued that Luke could not know what went on in the Sanhedrin's "closed-door" debate. The simple answer is ... Others who were either Christians or sympathetic could have easily reported on their discussions (Nicodemus, Gamaliel, or the apostle Paul).

The Council's Debate: vv. 16-17:

"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

Knowing they can't deny the miracle, the Council can only focus on what to do with Peter and John. Their question was not, "How can we dispute

what they have done?" or "What can we say to minimize the crowd's reception of this miracle?" No, the question is, "What are we going to do with these men?"

I'd like you to hear what John Piper says about their attitude towards this remarkable miracle:

The underlying question for the Sanhedrin was, "What can we do?" Legally, there was no basis to put them on trial. There was no evidence to convict them of fraud or deception.

The one thing the Council can do is threaten Peter and John – and use them as examples for the rest of the believers. By now their numbers have swelled from 120 to around 10,000 believers in Jerusalem alone.

What caused the miracle at the Gate Beautiful? The Name of Jesus. For the Council, what was the continuing danger? That the apostles would keep invoking that Name and more miracles would take place.

Their goal was "... To stop this thing from spreading any further".

The Sanhedrin's reach was long, and their powers were extensive. Any laws or decrees issued by the Sanhedrin were binding on all Jews. This council alone had the jurisdiction over cases involving the king, capital crimes committed by the high priest, or crimes committed by an entire tribe or city.

Their legal powers included: Crowning a king, authorizing wars necessary to expand Israel's borders, expanding any holy sites – including the Temple.

What could the Sanhedrin legally do about Peter and John's miracle? They could imprison them, whip them, or simply forbid them to continue their activities. They didn't impose a harsher punishment because they were afraid of the crowd that witnessed the healing of the crippled man.

Ultimately, the Council decided to threaten Peter and John with a threat that make it clear if they continue to spread the name of Jesus, the Council's displeasure would be further revealed. See: verse 18 - "Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."

- **The Apostles' Response: v. 19-20**

"But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

A hidden background to that statement: Greek Philosophers often stated that obeying God, rather than people, was important. In the same way, following truth rather than social convenience was an indication of truthfulness.

This was also true of the Old Testament prophets. Nathan, Elijah, and Jeremiah confronted kings, while Uriah suffered martyrdom. Luke's inclusion of Peter's statement would have made it clear to his readers who was on the right side in the confrontation with the Sanhedrin.

Verses 21-22: "After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old."

The Sanhedrin could only utter threats and let the apostles go. Ironically, this confrontation did not silence the apostles; it left the religious leaders speechless. They had nothing more to say.

Summarizing The Apostles' Encounter With The Sanhedrin:

1. The religious leaders had no evidence on their side; all the evidence of Jesus' resurrection favored the apostles.
2. The Sanhedrin could not refute the claim that Jesus had risen from the dead.
3. The Sanhedrin couldn't explain away the crippled man's miracle. Too many people could attest to its genuineness.
4. The Sanhedrin was in a "no win" situation with the apostles.