

Series: Proclaim	Reference: Acts 4:1-14	Title: The Ordinary	Date: 05.01.2022
Website Writeup: Today we look at what God can do through ordinary people in the simple proclamation of the Gospel!			

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One commentator, addressing pastors, recently said, “You’re congregation’s saying, “You are my shepherd, I’m your sheep. Lead me! Because, right now, it’s all performative preaching. Churches say healthy things grow, but weeds grow too. If you’re a pastor, your job isn’t to grow your church, it’s to preach Truth, that’s it....please just give us the Truth!”¹

Growth’s a healthy desire, the Gospel’s invitational. He speaks against the temptation to compromise for growth. Not at the expense of Truth, focusing on Jesus in the light of the full Gospel, not just making Him attractive & bending on issues in order to not offend. If the Truth of the Gospel doesn’t confront sensitivities, we’re not preaching it rightly. The message of Christ drives some away, we have to understand that.

The early church proclaimed clearly Jesus & His power no matter what. But often we try to sell the Christian faith. Celebrity pastors. Flashy services. Watering down the message - an imbalance on more palatable concepts. Packaging Jesus in such a way as not to offend - only attractive. Preaching grace, mercy & love while avoiding the darker underbelly of humanity, understanding sin & our propensity towards pride & evil. God seems to be dismantling this, His patience running thin in having His name besmirched. As a pastor daily I receive articles outlining an abusive or milquetoast pastor or church being laid low.

We should point people to Jesus. All He is & we are in light of Him, allowing Him do the rest. There’s power in the name of Christ - the complete Gospel message. The Gospel which says we must mourn before we celebrate, experience darkness before light & know sinfulness to know salvation. Jesus didn’t come just in grace, mercy & love, He also came in judgment of sin. In the end His enemies will become a footstool at His feet as Scripture teaches. Jesus’ message is power over sin & death to save, and when one rejects it, the consequence is eternal separation from God in death. But everlasting life in resurrection power for those who accept His message.

Missionary E. P. Scott in India one day found himself surrounded by armed men. *Spears pointed at him he took out his violin playing & singing a familiar hymn...¹All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all...²O seed of Israel's chosen race now ransomed from the fall, hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him Lord of all!...³Let every tongue & every tribe responsive to his call, to him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all!...*

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcF-6peWKYo>

Eyes closed he sang through that third verse after which he opened his eyes astonished to see spears dropped & men crying....power in Jesus' name. This is the point of the proclamation Peter makes in the next sermon we look at today.²

Turn with me to p745 of your pew Bibles as we read Acts 4:1-14...*The priests & the captain of the temple guard & the Sadducees came up to Peter & John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter & John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.*

⁵The next day the rulers, the elders & the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander & others of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter & John brought before them & began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers & elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame & are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you & all the people of Israel: 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. ¹¹Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." ¹³When they saw the courage of Peter & John & realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished & they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

This series looks at early church proclamations; God's revealed Word, inspired & useful for daily faith, providing us with a window to see how the early church shared the good news, and what it was exactly. Today's message comes shortly after the sermon Peter proclaimed on Pentecost we looked at last week.

The Disciples are demonstrating the power of God through signs & wonders, the church has continued to grow. In Acts 3, Peter & John heal a man who'd been unable to walk drawing a lot of attention. So in chapter 4 the leaders of the Temple come & arrest them (4:3). However, office hours were over for the day, so they imprisoned them for the night to deal with them in the morning. The next day (v. 4) they're brought before the High Priest & Sanhedrin for questioning.

² (Duncan Morrison, *The Great Hymns of the Church* [Toronto: Hart & Company, 1890], 157-158)

The Sanhedrin was the 71 member ruling body of Sadducees in Jerusalem led by the High Priest. Although the position was supposed to be for life, during the time of Roman occupation High Priests were regularly removed from their position. The Romans, by changing people out, could exert control. Nevertheless, because of the powerful families these guys came from, they remained influential in the Sanhedrin.³ It's to this body of ultimate power of Judaism to which Peter courageously speaks. He answers their questions turning it into a moment to proclaim Jesus.

The Sadducees of the first century represented a certain viewpoint. They rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees & considered only the written Torah of the Pentateuch as valid. That is the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures only. They considered the concepts of demons & angels, immortality & resurrection as innovations, believing in no life beyond this life. People with no future hope, which played into their outlook.

More important than theology was their political orientation. Largely from aristocracy, they were accommodationists with regard to Roman occupation. Possessing considerable economic interests, their concern was peace with Rome, preserving status quo & protecting their holdings. In return Rome accorded the Sadducees considerable power, invariably appointing the High Priest from their ranks, the most powerful political figure of Judaism. The prime concern of Sadducean aristocracy, of whom the High Priest was the head, was preservation of order, avoidance of any confrontation with Rome.

The Sadducees' annoyance at Peter & John's witness to the resurrection was not so much theological as political. Looking at the wording in v. 2, it doesn't say, "they were proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus," rather "*they were proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.*" They preached the resurrected Christ has power to bring wholeness, in Him there's power not only in this life to heal, but in future resurrection & eternal life of anyone who believes in Him. That speaks of something beyond this life, the government, and all that you see before you which makes a big difference!

Concepts with messianic overtones which to the Jews meant revolt, overthrow of foreign overlords & restoration of the Davidic kingdom. There'd been such movements before, Rome had put down. *As a matter of fact, Acts 5:36-37 tells us of two uprisings in the past. It says...Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. 37After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census & led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.*

There'd be more. In fact, the worst fears of the Sadducees were realized later when war broke out with the Romans in a.d. 66 with terrible consequences - 600,000 Jews killed, thousands taken captive, ending in the destruction of the Temple. The Roman army, led by the future Emperor Titus, with Tiberius Julius Alexander as second-in-command, besieged & conquered Jerusalem, which had been controlled by Judean rebel factions

³ (William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Daily Study Bible [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976], 38–39)

since the riots of a.d. 66. Josephus, a Jewish historian of the time, claims 1.1 million people total died during this up close bloody battle of spear & sword. Jesus had predicted this weeping over Jerusalem 70 years earlier entering the city at Passover on the back of a donkey.

So, with the large crowds surrounding Peter & John, their fears were aroused. Peter's sermon alarmed them: resurrection, Author of life, a new Moses - revolutionary ideas. The movement must be nipped in the bud.⁴ It's not necessarily that the Sanhedrin cared, or could fathom such a future destruction, but they did want to preserve their way of life & assets. Political opportunists, religion was a tool to this end.

Caiaphas, mentioned here, was instrumental in the death of Jesus since Jesus posed such a threat to the stability at the time. His impromptu coronation ceremony entering Jerusalem on the back of that donkey drew too much attention - couldn't have that! At the time of Jesus arrest in John 11 it says this about Caiaphas... *49Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! 50You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."*

And in John 18 it says...They bound him ¹³and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

Jesus was expendable to protect his interests with Rome. Not recognizing God had ridden into the city on the back of a donkey weeks before. Not listened to the words, or seen the signs that Christ was the final Passover Lamb slain for all peoples! That God Himself had visited them in the person of Jesus that day! His focus wasn't on what God was doing, but what religion could do to protect himself & his interests. When faith ceases to become risky & courageous in following God as He leads, cozying itself up to worldly politics we lose our way. Republicans & Democrats...take note.

We may view the Sadducees as religious people, but in all honesty, they were people who'd not accepted the entire Word of God. They only looked to the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Old Testament, not to the rest of God's Word. Making religion to be a political tool to further personal gain. They seem to want peace, but peace with Rome, not God's peace. We remember Jesus had said in Luke 12:51...*Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.* Division because the world's at odds with God, there'll not be ultimate peace until Christ reigns fully. Sin & peace can't walk hand-in-hand. Theirs was a religion of expediency & personal gain.

Think of the Church of today giving up on Scripture, not holding to them fully, using its influence for personal gain, accommodating culture to keep peace. When in actuality, we're called to preach the Gospel which divides to joint & marrow as Hebrews 4:12 says. In compromising we lose sight of our telos, no longer working for God, but for self. We

⁴ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 139-140.

think we're better, beyond influence of political affiliation - pride has seeped in. We point to people in the Scriptures like the Pharisees & Sadducees saying, "I can't believe they were like that!" All the while cozing ourselves up to certain political agendas in compromise of the Gospel of Christ.

The Sanhedrin summon Peter & John for questioning. The modern equivalent of 2 uneducated construction workers called before the U.S. Congress - people with law degrees from prestigious universities. **They ask Peter & John an important question: "By what power, or by what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7).**

That question is the setup to the proclamation. Peter doesn't answer the question immediately, instead turns their position upside down by painting them as being opposed to a good deed done for a crippled man (vv. 8-9). Then informs them the miracle was done by the power of Jesus' name (v. 10). At that moment, you could probably have heard a pin drop. Two uneducated construction workers just schooled Congress!

Peter doesn't stop there, declaring, *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (v. 12). Remarkable claim to make to religious experts who would've known Isaiah 43:11 which says...*"I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior."* Yet Peter says salvation's found only in the name of Jesus; focusing on the power of God in Christ. He's saying, "Caiaphas, and the rest of you, this same Jesus who rode in, proclaimed as king by the people at Passover was God incarnate - He alone saves you & anyone else - He's God!"

The Sanhedrin, the highest court of justice & the supreme council in ancient Jerusalem, trusted in intellect, position, politics & aristocracy. No different than following celebrity pastors, politicians, the educated & powerful. Two ordinary unschooled men facing down the dragon at their own risk to speak Truth to a blind establishment!

Peter's very presence in front of the Sanhedrin demonstrates the truth of his claim. The Sanhedrin were astonished realizing John & Peter were "uneducated, common men" (4:13). Tim Keller shows how the presence of these ordinary men proclaiming Jesus to religious leaders demonstrates the power of the gospel. **He writes, "But the reason they were astonished was because they didn't grasp the gospel. The gospel is that one's past record's never pristine (it's full of selfishness, pride & sin) and that therefore 'ordinary men' can be saved, chosen & gifted by God for service. Peter & John have this confidence because they've received their position with God & their position in His service all by grace."**⁵ They pointed to Jesus, the ordinary revealed God's glory.

The question as to the 'name' behind their preaching was of accreditation & authorization. Peter couldn't let it go by. The lame man was healed by the name of Jesus. If the Sanhedrin wanted to know about that name, he'd tell them. So, Peter gave

⁵ (Tim Keller, *Evangelism: Studies in the Book of Acts* [New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2005], 46)

them a sermon & in fulfillment of Jesus' promise (Luke 12:11f.), he's given a special endowment of the Holy Spirit to boldly bear witness. The crux of the sermon's a play on the Greek word *sōzō*, which means both physical 'salvation' in the sense of healing (v. 9) as well as the spiritual, eschatological sense of salvation (v. 12). The physical 'salvation' of the lame man through the name of Jesus points to the far greater salvation which comes to all who call upon his name in faith.⁶ A future hope in Christ which makes a huge difference on how you view life & all its workings now!

Peter basically said, "This name isn't destructive, it brings wholeness." Underlining his point by saying, "Be very sure of this, you & everyone else in Israel."⁷

Peter's appeal is implicit in his proclamation. If there's salvation in no other name (v. 12), then obviously one must make a commitment to that sole name which brings salvation. But the appeal's even stronger, because Peter switched to the first person at the end of the verse, "by which we must be saved," a direct appeal to the Sanhedrin. Very bold - Peter's come full circle. They asked for the name in whom his authority rested. He answered - the powerful name of Jesus. The One they'd directly rejected. The ultimate verdict rested with them. Would they continue to reject the One whom God had placed as the final stone for His people, the only name under heaven by which they'd find their own salvation? The verdict would rest in their personal decision.⁸

It's interesting - those who express the clearest Truth are often people we'd deem least likely to have the ability. The uneducated & ordinary speaking Truth, presenting the verdict, and letting Jesus manage the results even if it means difficulty for them.

What can Jesus do through you, an ordinary person who simply preaches the clear Gospel of Christ to those around you? Are you ready for the consequences which lie somewhere between people coming to Jesus, or you being hated for your faith?

⁶ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 143.

⁷ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 143-144.

⁸ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 144-145.