

PETER AND JOHN ORDERED NOT TO TALK ABOUT JESUS

Acts 4:1-31

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Peter, John, and religious leaders

Key-location: Temple in Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Jesus: Jesus' name (Ac 4:2, 10, 11, 13, 17, 18, 27, 30).
- Apostles testified about Jesus: Peter spoke about Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders (Ac 4:1-12); religious leaders ordered Peter and John not to speak in Jesus' name (Ac 4:18); apostles answered that they should obey God and speak about the things they had seen and heard (Ac 4:19-22).
- Jewish leaders' opposition to the apostles: temple leaders arrested Peter and John (Ac 4:1-4); religious leaders ordered Peter and John not to speak or teach in Jesus' name (Ac 4:18); religious leaders threatened Peter and John (Ac 4:21).
- Religious leaders realized Peter and John: were unschooled, ordinary men (Ac 4:13); had been with Jesus (Ac 4:13); performed a miracle and everyone in Jerusalem knew it (Ac 4:16).
- Threats: religious leaders planned to threaten Peter and John (Ac 4:17); leaders made more threats (Ac 4:21); Peter and John prayed to God about the religious leaders' threats and requested boldness for themselves (Ac 4:29).
- Filled with the Holy Spirit—speaking boldly: Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly spoke to the religious leaders (Ac 4:8-12); all the gathered believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and they boldly spoke God's word (Ac 4:31).

Key-attitudes:

- Jewish leaders' anger over Peter and John speaking about Jesus.
- Jewish leaders' confusion about how to deal with Peter and John.
- Peter and John's courage before Jewish leaders.
- Peter and John's confidence in prayer to God.

Initial-situation:

The followers of Jesus met together every day, praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. Daily the Lord added to their number. At the temple gate, Peter and John healed a man born crippled, and then told the gathered crowd that the man was healed by the power of the name of Jesus.

Initial-problem:

Religious leaders arrived while Peter and John were telling the crowd that the crippled beggar was healed by the power of Jesus.

Final-situation:

Peter and John prayed. All the gathered believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly spoke God's word.

BIBLE STORY

The religious leaders (including the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees) arrived while Peter and John were speaking to the crowd about Jesus. The religious leaders were upset because Peter and John proclaimed that dead people would come back to life through Jesus. They arrested Peter and John, and put them in jail until the next day. Many who heard the message believed, and the number of believers grew to about five thousand (Ac 4:1-4).

The next day the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin Council met and questioned Peter and John, "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and answered, "Rulers and elders of the people! You're cross-examining us about the good we did for a crippled man. The crippled man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified. But God brought him back to life. Salvation is found in no one else. We can only be saved by the one named Jesus and not by any other name" (Ac 4:5-12).

The religious leaders saw Peter and John's courage and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men. The religious leaders realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus. The religious leaders saw the former crippled man standing with the apostles. There was nothing they could say. The religious leaders conferred together and asked, "What are we going to do with these men? Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done a great miracle. We must stop this thing from spreading any farther. So let's threaten them and order them to never speak to anyone about Jesus."

Then the religious leaders commanded Peter and John never to speak again in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered, "Judge for yourselves what God wants. Should we obey you rather than God? We must speak about the things we've seen and heard."

The religious leaders made more threats; then they let Peter and John go. All the people were praising God (Ac 4:13-22).

On their release, Peter and John returned to their group and reported all that the religious leaders had said to them. Then Peter and John prayed to God, "Sovereign Lord, you made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and everything in them. King Herod, Pontius Pilate, with non-Jews and the Israelites conspired against your holy servant Jesus. What you have already planned, they made happen. Now, Lord, listen to their threats and help us, your servants, to speak your word with boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miracles through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Peter and John prayed and their meeting place shook. All the gathered believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and they boldly spoke God's word (Ac 4:23-31).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Peter tell the Jewish leaders who questioned them after the healing of the crippled man?
2. What motivated Peter and John to challenge the authorities of their time?
3. Under what circumstances do we have the right to disobey those who have authority over us?
4. How did the apostles suffer because of Jesus?
5. How do some people today suffer because of Jesus?
6. What hinders you from speaking God's word boldly?
7. How did Peter and John pray after they were threatened by the religious leaders?
8. In times of crisis, how are your prayers similar to or different from Peter and John's prayer when they were threatened if they spoke about Jesus?
9. What seems to be the purpose of a Christian being filled with the Holy Spirit? (See Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31.)

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **If spiritual leaders become "professional religious leaders", they will develop theological prejudices in order to protect the privileges of their position. They will also struggle against the God they profess to serve.** The priests who controlled the temple arrested the apostles because they were speaking about Jesus (Ac 4:3). The religious leaders in the Sanhedrin Council ordered Peter and John not to speak or teach in Jesus' name (Ac 4:13-18).
2. **A person can only be delivered from sin by accepting God's plan for salvation.** A person can only be saved through Jesus Christ (Ac 4:12). In the Old Testament, the Lord rejected the fig-leaf clothes that Adam and Eve made for themselves (Gn 3:21). God refused Cain's sacrifice, because it did not agree with his plan (Gn 4:5,7). Noah had to build the ark exactly as God instructed him. In the flood, there was only one ark, and the ark had only one door (Gn 6:16). In Egypt, only the people whose houses were marked by the blood of the lamb escaped the visit of the death angel (Ex 12:1-36). The New Testament reveals that Jesus is the only road

to God (Jn 14:6; Ac 4:12). Today, only those who believe that Jesus shed his blood to pay for their sins are saved from being condemned by God's judgment.

3. **Sometimes it is risky to share the gospel.** Peter and John spoke about Jesus and were sent to jail for the night (Ac 4:3). The religious authorities threatened Peter and John if they spoke again about Jesus (Ac 4:18, 21).
4. **Divine authority is superior to human authority. Human authority does not have the right to prevent a person from obeying God.** The apostles could not obey the Jewish religious leaders and stop speaking about Jesus (Ac 4:19).
5. **Instead of asking God to remove a problem, ask God to help you deal with it.** Peter and John did not ask God to protect them from the threats of violence made by the Jewish religious leaders, but to enable them to speak God's word with boldness (Ac 4:24-30).
6. **The Spirit gives Jesus' followers courage and helps them testify about Jesus.** Peter was full of the Holy Spirit (Ac 3:8) and he spoke boldly (Ac 3:13). Christians who prayed together after John and Peter's imprisonment were full of the Holy Spirit and boldly announced the message of the Lord (Ac 4:31).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Ask for three volunteers to tell the story from the viewpoint of one of the characters in the story:

- The crippled beggar who was healed.
- A religious leader who wanted to punish Peter and John, but who couldn't deny that the crippled beggar was healed.
- A believer who heard Peter and John report all that the religious leaders had said and then prayed with the apostles.

Tell the story a second time. Then each volunteer tells the story from the viewpoint of the character he represents.