

Sunday School Notes: 5 August 2018: Troubles for the Church (Acts 3:1- 4:31)

The first problems in the church arose out of something good – a miraculous healing.

One afternoon Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray.

They arrived there just as a lame beggar was carried to the temple by his friends so that he could earn some money by begging. He was about 40 years old and had never been able to walk. By Jewish law consequently he had probably never been allowed to go into the temple and join in the prayers or worship. But the temple gate was probably a good place to sit as people would think they were earning a few bonus points with God by being generous to a beggar before they prayed.

Possibly Peter and John had seen the man sitting there on other occasions. But today the Holy Spirit told them to react to him. When he asked for money, they saw past his begging to his pain, his old clothes and his twisted body. The man looked up expectantly, thinking they were going to give him something. But he got more than he expected! Peter reached out and took the man's right hand. He explained that, although they had no money to give him, they had something else to give: 'in Jesus' name' he was to get up and walk. Immediately the man's ankles and feet were made strong. Imagine the feeling – able to stand for the first time; able to walk and able to go into the temple to pray for the first time ever!

The man was so excited that he didn't just walk; he leapt about as he praised God aloud. Everyone would have turned to see what was causing the commotion. Imagine how their jaws dropped when they recognised the lame beggar. Imagine their questions. Immediately people would have pushed and shoved their way over to him to find out what had happened. He probably pointed to Peter and John, and said "They did it!"

But Peter told the crowd that he and John had done nothing! This was God at work through his son, Jesus. When the people heard that name, they were puzzled. Jesus was dead – he was history. What had he to do with this man's healing? So Peter explained that they were wrong; Jesus was alive. He was the Messiah who wanted to bless everyone as he had blessed this man.

Many of those who heard him realised that the miracle proved that Jesus hadn't been just a pretender. They realised they had been wrong. They knew now that Jesus was God's special messenger who was indeed alive and powerful, and they began to trust Jesus. So more people were added to the church that day.

BUT

Enemies decided to act. The temple authorities saw the crowds starting to believe in Jesus and they got worried. They had got rid of Jesus and his troublesome preaching. Now, they had to make sure these followers of his got the message: "Keep quiet and go home to Galilee and forget about this so-called Messiah who is dead!" So they sent the guards. Peter and John were arrested and kept in the temple prison overnight. The priests probably thought this would terrify the fishermen.

But they were wrong! The next day the temple leaders called together all the chief priests and held a trial. They hoped to overpower these ordinary men with their authority. "By whose power did you do this?" they asked. Imagine how shocked the judges were when these country bumpkins were

able to answer with courage and skill. But, of course, the court was arguing with God's Spirit, not with Peter, and so Peter and John the courage to stand up to their accusers.

These chief priests and the judges knew they had no case against Peter and John. After all, all they had done was to heal someone. And when they could not change the minds of Peter and John (and the healed man who stood with them), there was nothing they could do. Everyone knew the facts.

So they decided to use bully tactics: "We know better than you do, so remember to keep quiet! Do not speak or teach in Jesus' name."

Quick as a flash, the Holy Spirit enabled Peter to answer and put the priests in a difficult position: "Should people listen to the priests or to God?" he asked. Of course, no priest could tell someone not to listen to God! And, while the priests muttered among themselves, Peter pointed out that the followers of Jesus couldn't help themselves; they simply had to speak about Jesus!

All the priests could do was to repeat their warning and let the men go.

The people were thrilled, and Peter and John went off to tell their story to the rest of the community which had been praying hard for them. We can be sure that, as the news broke that Peter and John were freed and unharmed, the pray-ers thanked God. (**Prayer 1**)

But more of their prayer is recorded – and some of it amazes us. We would probably expect that they would ask God to protect them in future. But no! Verses from Psalm 2, which they had recited all their lives, suddenly made sense. They realised that trouble and persecution weren't unexpected or avoidable. Even King David long ago had known that when he wrote a poem saying that the leaders would not accept the Messiah! So instead of praying for protection, they prayed that God would make them brave (v 29). (**Prayer 2**)

Then they prayed a **third prayer**: asking that God would continue to make his name great. Life would have been safer if things had calmed down, but they didn't ask for that! They were so thrilled with the good news about a loving, caring and forgiving God that they wanted others to see God's power!

And God responded joyfully. As they prayed the place where they were began to shake and each person there was filled with the joy and excitement of the Holy Spirit. And at once they bravely spoke out about their Lord Jesus Christ.

The Jewish leaders' rant had not worked. Imprisonment had only sparked more love and obedience and strength. The people could not "keep from speaking about what [they] had seen and heard".

How would we react in similar situations? Does this still happen?

Yes, God can still make us brave. There are many stories of amazing bravery for Christ these days (*You will find some on the internet if you look.*) We might also have to stand up for our beliefs or morals at times against cyber bullying. But the best news is that the Holy Spirit will be there if we ask him to be part of our lives, guiding us as to how to respond.