

Peter & John Before the Sanhedrin



Ice-Breaker

Describe a time when you felt right about breaking the rules.



Scripture Passage

Acts 4:1-22

4 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

⁵The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and 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 and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and 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. ¹¹He is

"`the stone you builders rejected,

which has become the capstone.^a^b

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

¹³When 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. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶"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. ¹⁷But 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."

¹⁸Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

²¹After 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. ²²For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

a [11] Or cornerstone

b [11] Psalm 118:22



Bible Study

1. What roles did the priest, captain of the guard and the Sadducees play in the ministry of Jesus

(see Luke 20:27-40; 22:6,52)? Why would the Sadducees oppose the disciples' preaching (v. 2)? What would you feel if you were one of the believers who saw Peter and John taken away? If you were Peter or John?

2. What is the high priest's family trying to do (v. 7)? seek information or intimidate the disciples? Why (see v. 2; 3:16)?

3. If you were one of the authorities, what would be your reaction to Peter's bold answer? How does Peter "filled with the Holy Spirit" (vv. 8-12) compare with the purpose of the filling in 2:4 (see also Luke 21:12-13)?

4. How is the leader's response similar to their response to the Lazarus episode (see John 11:45-53; 12:10-11)? Why are they reacting like this?

Reference Notes

4:1 the captain of the temple guard. A high-ranking official who had the responsibility of maintaining order in the temple. the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a wealthy group who believed only in the first five books of the Old Testament and denied the Resurrection. The Sadducees play a leading role in the opposition to the church in Acts (see 23:6-8).

4:2 The Sadducees considered teaching to be a priestly right alone. To further upset things, the disciples were preaching the resurrection, a doctrine which the Sadducees did not believe.

4:6 Annas the high priest. Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, was the official high priest since Annas had been removed from office in A.D. 14 by the Roman procurator. Within Jewish circles Annas retained both the title and much of the real power.

4:9 There may be more than a touch of irony in Peter's reference to the "crime" for which they were detained!

4:10 Although the Sanhedrin represented the highest level of authority and power in the Jewish social and political structure, Peter is not intimidated by them. He confronts them with the fact that the miracle was not a product of sorcery, but of faith in the power of Jesus, the Messiah, whom they had officially condemned to death a few weeks before. Again, the apostolic message stresses three central facts about Jesus: (1) although he was crucified, God raised him from death and exalted him as Messiah (Acts 2:32-36; 3:13-15); (2) he continues to be present and active among those who trust in him (Acts 2:33; 3:16); and (3) the promise of salvation from sin is for those who will respond in faith to him (Acts 2:38-39; 3:19-20; 4:12).

4:11 While Psalm 118:22 originally referred to the exaltation of Israel among the nations that despised her, Peter interprets it in reference to the rejection of Jesus the Messiah by the Jewish leaders. The "stone" they despised would turn out to occupy the crowning point of God's building. This passage is quoted as well in 1 Peter 2:7 and alluded to in Ephesians 2:20.

4:12 Peter applies verse 11 by insisting that Jesus, whom they have rejected, is indeed the keystone in God's whole plan of salvation: "he brought it about and only in him can we find it" (Williams). **Salvation.** The Greek word for healing and salvation is the same, which allows Peter to make an easy transition from discussing the condition of the formerly crippled man to the spiritual state of the members of the Sanhedrin. The point is clear: either they repent and believe so that they may experience God's salvation, or they can persist in their rejection of Jesus and forfeit the very

hope for which Israel had so long waited.

4:13 The Sanhedrin not only realizes that Peter and John are disciples of Jesus, but also the boldness with which Peter speaks is all too reminiscent of the way Jesus spoke with arguments and objections that left his opponents' arguments in shambles (Luke 20:19,26,40). Luke probably intends this as another example of Jesus at work through his Spirit in the apostles (compare v. 14 with Luke 21:15). **unschooled, ordinary men.** Marshall cites C.H. Dodd in saying that these two Greek words "translate a Hebrew phrase which refers to people ignorant of the Torah or Jewish Law." As fishermen by trade, Peter and John certainly never had the formal rabbinical training that many members of the Sanhedrin would have had.

4:15 How Luke got this inside information is uncertain although at least one member of the council was a believer in Jesus and may have been Luke's source of information (Luke 23:50ff). **then conferred together.** It is interesting to contrast the response of the Sanhedrin under pressure to that of the disciples (4:24ff): the Sanhedrin "confer together" whereas the disciples pray.

4:16-17 Recognizing the irrefutable fact that the man was healed and the widespread popular support for the disciples (v. 21), the Sanhedrin realized there was little they could do at this point except try to use their power and status to intimidate the disciples into silence. They may still have feared a popular uprising that would bring down the harsh military might of the Romans (John 11:48), or they may more personally fear the reaction of the people against them if this belief about Jesus as the Messiah got too widespread.

4:18 One can imagine the somber, threatening tones as the command of the Sanhedrin was given to Peter and John.

4:19-20 Peter and John, whether they are facing the council alone or together, both assert that the council has overstepped its bounds. Since the Sanhedrin set itself against God and his Messiah, the disciples have no choice but to ignore their commands and remain faithful to the Messiah. This response serves as a check on Paul's general principle about submission to government in Romans 13:1-7. Paul's point there is to correct notions that "freedom in Christ" means Christians have the right to ignore civil laws and authority: instead he asserts that since government is ordained of God to keep order and peace, normally the Christian ought to be the most responsible of citizens. But when government stubbornly defies God and his ways (as the Sanhedrin did here), then responsible resistance is demanded as a part of faithfulness to the authority of God. When such resistance is necessary is a difficult decision sometimes, and one considering it must consult the Spirit's guidance.

Caring Time

1. When, if ever, do you feel that Peter's response to his political and religious leaders would be appropriate for a Christian today? How do you reconcile this passage (vv. 18-21) with Romans 13:1-4?
2. What is the most persecution you have experienced due to your faith? How did you take it?
3. On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how sure are you of Peter's statement in verse 12? What has built your assurance the most? What doubts still linger?
4. How has knowing Jesus shaped your character"?