

Introduction: Bullied by Farm Girl

Ever been bullied or picked on? Intimidated or scared? Was your response fight or flight? Up until this point in our Supernatural series everything has been onward and upward for newfound church. The Spirit is moving, people are getting saved by the 1000s. Peter and John were involved in the miracle of a crippled man. The church itself is experiencing unprecedented growth: from 120-15,000 in less than two weeks! However, and you can take this to the bank, wherever the Church is flourishing the devil is working overtime to stop it. In Acts 4, we see his bullying tactics to stymie the advance of the Church.

1 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. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and preaching in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

Peter & John Arrested

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to “build his church” and in the first three chapters of Acts he was doing so unimpeded. However, Jesus also promised in Matthew 16:18 that the “gates of hell” would work with singular fury and focus to defeat his church. The devil’s main tactics are persecution, disunity, false teaching, and indifference. So here is hell “striking back” in the form of persecution. To kill a snake, one must cut off its head so the religious and political leaders team up and go after the head of the church, Peter and John. Their crime? Spreading misinformation that Jesus was resurrected. The Sadducees were a political group aligned with Roman interests. They repudiated belief in the afterlife. For them, resurrections were merely figments of the religious imagination.

The “Priests” represent the religious class called the Pharisees. Unlike the Sadducees, they believed in resurrection, but with three caveats: 1) not before the end of history, 2) not on an individual but a general basis, and 3) not for a seditious blasphemer named Jesus. Ever hear the saying, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend?” The Sadducees and Pharisees hated each other but now they have a common enemy which threatens their institutional power. They arrest Peter and John and throw them in jail without first reading their Miranda rights or allowing a phone call.

The Trial

The next day the big guns show up in the form of Annas, a former high priest, and his successor Caiaphas. If you remember they ended Jesus (so they thought), so their sole motivation is to snuff out his cult following before it gains traction. Their interrogation of Peter and John begins with a question, “By what power or what name did you do this” (v7). Only the high priests could certify teachers of doctrine and theology and those candidates had to be formally trained. So, what they are saying is, “We neither authorized you or your message so by what right do you teach backwater hoboese?” The last time Peter, the Christ follower formerly known as “Big Daddy Fraidy Cat,” was asked about Jesus, he folded quicker than an overcaffeinated origami artist. So now would he take flight or stay and fight? This time, he fights. Filled with the HS he launches into an apologetic (v8-12)

8 “Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 then 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. 11 He is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.” 12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Evil hates that which is good, so Peter pulls no punches

You’re really going to prosecute us for healing a crippled guy? Be that as it may, we didn’t even do it, the resurrected Jesus did. Remember him? The Son of God and God the Son which you crucified? Well, he’s the point of it all and in case you are confused, the only access to heaven.

Listen to the reaction of the persecutors (v13-17)

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. 14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. 15 So 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. 17 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.”

The Sadducees and Priest are being impaled on the horns of a dilemma. They know that everybody in the city knows the crippled man was healed in Jesus’ Name and his miracle is not fake news but if they kill Peter and John, they’ll start a riot. They decide the best way out is to issue a verbal moratorium on Peter and John (v18)

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach AT ALL in the name of Jesus.

If you’re thinking Peter and John are grateful with getting off with a proverbial slap on the wrist and a promise you would be wrong. In an act of defiance, they respond (v19-20).

19 “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

In other words, “We ain’t ever going to stop, because our allegiance is with a much higher authority and it’s far better to obey him rather than you!” After issuing more warnings and threats the demonic powers have no choice but to let Peter and John go. They are free, for now. But catch this, when they go back and tell their church family what happened everyone begins to praise God because that they were found worthy enough to be persecuted for the sake of Jesus. “WoW!”

Conclusion: Sources of Boldness

In v13 we are told that the ungodly alliance was astonished by Peter and John’s courage. Annas and Caiaphas could have snapped their fingers and Peter and John would be instantaneously put to death. They didn’t, however, because the intimidators became the intimidated. But what were the sources of Peter and John’s courage? I see three.

Almighty God. If we really believe God is Almighty is there anything to fear? Yes! Him! Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.
Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**

If we reverence/respect God as the highest of all power all lesser powers like demons, disease, and death will dissipate. For this reason, John said, “Greater is he that is in you than he is off this world” (4:4). Why David said, The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is

the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid? And “The righteous are bolder than lions, the wicked flee when no one is pursuing (Proverbs 28:1) And why Paul added, “If God be for us who can be against us” and “Nothing will separate us from the love of God, not “tribulation, distress, or persecution (Romans 8:31, 35). And why Martin Luther wrote in the famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is our God,” the lyric “The body they may kill, God’s truth abideth still, and he will win the battle.”

The second source of their courage was the resurrection of Jesus. Nuff said! He conquered death, what’s left to fear (they can only kill you once)? V13 tells us that the authorities could tell that Peter and John had been with Jesus. The more we are with Jesus the bolder we get.

The third source of their boldness was the indwelling Holy Spirit. V8 points out that Peter and John were filled with the Holy Spirit. Christians, we have the greatest of all powers residing us. When we start believing this, the Kingdom will come down before sundown!

Although we may not have much persecution impeding us yet (that will soon change with the adoption of woke ideology), we still need more boldness to become an invitational church. Who’s ready to unleash that courage and invite three people this week?