

The Apostle's First Test

The occasion of healing a man lame from birth, and the subsequent gathering of people, provided Peter and John a unique teaching opportunity, Acts chapter 3. The people were seeing the power of God at work in an individual they had known for years. They were ready to learn about Jesus. But the self-centered leaders of the Temple services became very upset to hear that Peter and John were teaching the resurrection of Jesus on the entry porch to the Temple. Peter and John were arrested and, since it was evening, placed in confinement until morning (Acts 4:1-3). The confident Sadducees and High Priesthood prepared to stand against the apostles of Christ and The Holy Spirit.

"On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem" (Acts 4:5). Some of the Sanhedrin lived in Jericho and came for this hearing. They should have been present for Jesus' hearing. Luke lists all three classes as being present, the rulers or chief priests, the scribes who were mostly Pharisees, and the elders from among the people. The Sanhedrin was said to be composed of 24 priests, 24 elders, and 22 scribes (RWP). The scribes were the lawyers, those most familiar with the Law of Moses. *"Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent"* (Acts 4:6). The assembly is like having all portions of the law, judge, jury, and prosecution, all arrayed against the accused.

When Peter and John were brought in, they were asked, *"By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"* (Acts 4:7). The Sanhedrin considered themselves to be the only authority in the Jewish world and, specifically, in Jerusalem. They allowed no one to work or teach without their authorization. The question of authorizing healing of a man lame from birth was one thing, but to preach Jesus raised from the dead was something they could not tolerate. So, rejecting the idea of Jesus whom they crucified, no other power could have authorized these actions. But it was not an uneducated fisherman that responded.

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..." (Acts 4:8). The power and authorization in giving bone and muscle strength where none had been are in the same source, *"The name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health"* (Acts 4:10). The Spirit description covered all possibilities to identify the one and only individual they had delivered to the Romans for execution. *"He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:11-12). The confidence shown by Peter and John, along with the healed man standing beside them, silenced the Sanhedrin.

The council called a recess and found themselves in the same position as when Jesus asked them who authorized John's baptism (Matthew 21:24-27). It is a sad thing when you cannot honor and admit the truth. So the leaders commanded the apostles *"not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"* (Acts 4:18). The answer from Peter and John defined the course they and all believers would follow, *"Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:19-20).

The brethren assembled in Jerusalem heard the report and bonded together in thanksgiving and prayer. They quoted from the Psalms and proclaimed The Lord as the only source of authority. The quotations from Psalm 2 bring to mind this entire passage. *"Why are the nations in an uproar And the*

*peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!" He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, "But as for Me, **I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain**" (Psalms 2:1-6).*

As the disciples prayed, they used a word for Lord that only occurs ten times in scripture, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them" (Acts 4:24). The word is "despotēs" and means absolute ruler or master. The English directive is "dictator." But it clearly states the position held by the Father but delegated to the Son. Jesus is the only source of power in matters concerning the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). He is the author of doctrine (Hebrews 2:10, 12:2). And He is the King authorizing the actions of the apostles and, subsequently, all of His followers (Matthew 28:18). The wording of their prayer (Acts 4:24-30) is that they, the apostles, and we as well, might stand firm with Christ against all powers of the evil one.

What is the source of your authority?