

“Would you quit attending services if authorities ordered you to stop?”

Acts 4:13-22

“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.

‘Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.’

“¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’

“²¹ After 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.



Marathon, Greece

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

Would you quit attending services if authorities ordered you to stop?

As I visited by phone with one of our sons last week, he commented, “Dad, you spent three weeks talking about *Acts* chapter 3.”

“Yes, I did,” I admitted, “and Lord willing, we’ll spend four weeks on chapter 4.”

In case you wonder, that doesn’t mean that chapter 5 will have five sermons, and 6, six.

A story about marathons best explains the reason for this *Book of Acts* emphasis.

You probably know; Marathon races have their origin in a 490 B.C Greek battle.

Greeks fought against invading Persians near Marathon, a village northeast of Athens.

A runner carried the message of the Greek’s win over the Persians.

To bring the victory news, he ran from Marathon to Athens.

When forming the “modern Olympics” in 1896, to commemorate that grueling run, they set the Marathon’s distance at 26 miles, 385 yards.

I read that a 1960 Saturday Evening Post cartoon depicted the original Marathon runner finishing the arduous 26 miles looking puzzled, saying:

“I’ve forgotten the message.”

How does that Marathon story relate to Acts?
For a long time, churches have either forgotten or neglected Jesus’ main message.

1. First, today, a reminder; Acts says the Apostles were regular guys whom Jesus changed.

The intellectual and power elites brought in Peter and John, surrounded them, accused them, questioned them, and warned them.

Two things amazed the elites.

Peter and John didn’t attend the Jewish equivalent of Harvard, Stanford, or MIT.

They didn’t even teach synagogue school.

They could read and write Greek, of course, but they weren’t formally trained and didn’t rub shoulders with religious or political VIPs.

Peter and John likely had calloused hands and faces weathered by the elements.

They stood before a privileged group consisting of the High Priest, the captain of the Temple police, and about 70 other religious “experts.”

Yet these powerful, highly influential guys didn’t intimidate Peter and John.
Why not?



Peter and John knew God’s Word, they knew Jesus, and spoke boldly of him; so our text reads:

“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.”

Remember, the Apostles healed the man in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified.

The elites faced a powerful piece of evidence:

“Since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.”

That forty-year-old was so grateful for God’s healing, he didn’t want to let Peter and John out of his sight.

So those fancy titled, gas-bag elites faced two miracles that blew their case apart.

Everyone who’d gone to the Temple knew about this cripple; he’d begged at the gates every day.

Acts 3:16: “This man you see and know...”

No one could dispute that he’d been healed.

Some of us have undergone back, hip, or knee surgery.

We require several physical therapy sessions, some strenuous, before we walk correctly.

Many never walk normally again.

With no pain, the beggar experienced instant healing and joyfully kicked up his heels.



Luke, who wrote *Acts*, used several different medical terms to describe this man's healing.

Our word *therapy* comes from the term Luke used in verse 14.

The beggar's complete therapy witnessed to the sign the court members saw.

He probably stood by the apostles hoping he could do a demonstration leap.

You recall the other evident miracle; the extraordinary change in the apostles.

In the eyes of the court members, Peter and John were “hick, improperly educated, ignoramuses.”

Yet these two “hicks” knew God's Word better than the “experts.”

Through them, God performed an incontrovertible sign.

That leaper, who likely could have dunked baskets with the best of guys on the court tomorrow night stood in front of them grinning.

2. The baffled court members consulted one another about what to do.

The “heresy” was spreading like spring dandelions. **Thousands had already repented and believed Jesus.**

“They . . . commanded them (the Apostles) not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

If authorities jailed you for a night, then took you to a courtroom and before 70 prominent officials ordered you to say nothing more about Jesus, would you be here next Sunday?

Recall what the Apostles told the leaders earlier:

“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

“¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.”¹

That message irritated the leaders, didn't it? Peter, John, and the new high jumper could go, but they had to quit telling the Jesus message.

Churches have all but forgotten that vital message.

¹ Acts 3:13-16 The word *holoklarian* (ὅλοκλρίαν) means whole and without defect. Think *whole* as in holistic medicine. *Healed* in verse 4:10, *hygiene* (ὑγιής).

Lots of activity takes place.

Churches build lavish worship buildings, sponsor VBS and Sunday schools, put on special events, promote social programs, attempt to better society, try to empower certain groups, but hardly anyone tells Jesus' full resurrection message.



I confess to losing sight of it at times and should have known better.

A friend once told me about a Methodist minister and a Catholic priest who died and arrived the same time at the pearly gates.

Peter greeted them and told them that they definitely had reservations in heaven, but a recent spate of deaths had caused a housing shortage. Construction of heavenly mansions was at a fast pace, but in the meantime, the priest and preacher must go the fiery place below on a temporary basis.

A month later, the devil called Peter and he was upset. “Would you get these guys out of here?” the devil complained, “Between bingo games and chicken dinners, that priest and preacher are within a hundred bucks of air conditioning this place!”

You know that no detail of that story is true, yet it illustrates the emphasis of many churches.

Norma and I have recently seen advertising for an Easter event called “risefest” or similar title.

Tickets are “only” \$40.50 a head.

Event sponsors do not have in mind what Peter and John said:

“We don’t have silver and gold . . .”

Other church people try to maintain their power and popularity by conforming to the world’s standards.

They strive to be politically correct.

They dismiss Scriptures that condemn sin by stating “God loves you just the way you are.”

Think a moment about that “love” statement from the perspective of a parent.

Imagine being the parent of a three-year-old.

You look out the front window and see your small one playing in the street.

Do you open the door and yell: “I love you Jr., just the way you are,” and leave him there?

The behavior God’s word condemns does not promote healthy people or strong nations.

Societies are faltering fatally because of greed, loneliness, fear of death, lack of purpose, and immorality.

The depression and defeat many suffer can’t be solved medically, politically, or economically.

Church leaders have joined godless societies in neglecting to honor God and live by his Word.

Do you recall what Jesus said to those who reported to him the latest atrocities in Israel?

“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

The issue for us is not the sins others commit.

We must all change our actions and honor God.

Many of us are informed of where the Russians are positioned in Ukraine and are aware of the carnage.

We've heard the latest political poll numbers.

We know the prices of gasoline, hamburger, and milk, beans, corn, and hay.

How many faithfully read God's Word and try to fully obey Him?

The Apostles spent three years with Jesus.

He apparently had them memorize lots of Old Testament Scripture as he had.

Jesus contrasted human ideas with God's word and called his disciples to live by his example.

Peter and John knew Jesus and followed him.

3. Finally, suppose you spent almost three years with a perfect person.

You saw how he reacted to various life-tests.

You saw how he controlled his emotions and actions by prayerfully staying in touch with God.



To your horror, greedy, power-hungry, jealous people falsely accused and executed your friend.

Among his last words was a prayer asking God to forgive those who killed him.

Three days later you hear reports that his grave is empty and then you see him yourself.

Knowing your doubts, he lets you feel and see the wound-scars he suffered and shares meals with you.

He spends 40 days proving he is alive.

He overcame all temptation, and he conquered death.

You watch him ascend to God promising that he'll come back to raise you, too, and others when he returns to Judge all of us.

He wants you to tell others how he, Jesus, defeated death.

How soon would you tell your loved ones and neighbors: “God's love wins and death is dead”?

“Repent and receive God's great news in Christ. Live by his word and respond to his Spirit.”

That's the message churches neglect.

That message heals souls and bodies; resolves loneliness, gives us purpose, and glorifies God.

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