

Peter and John stand before the highest religious court in the land because the evening before they claimed a man was healed by the power and name of the resurrected Jesus Christ of Nazareth. THIS is the perfect opportunity for the Sanhedrin to once and for all disprove the Apostle's claim that Jesus Christ has resurrected.

Here, the highest religious court in the land has two of the leaders who were the followers of Jesus standing right in front of them! The Sanhedrin have them right where they want them. Here is their golden opportunity, handed to them on a silver platter - gathered on one side of this great hall, a majority of the most brilliant minds of the day on the intricacies of the Hebrew Bible and on the intricacies of Judaism, and standing on the other side of this great hall are two untrained men from the minor region of Galilee.

This should be child's play.

Notice, the Sanhedrin do not take action here, or at any other time, to disprove the claims of the resurrection of Jesus. What is absolutely amazing here is that Peter makes two incredible claims - and these brilliant men cannot refute these claims, they are at a loss for words.

Why?

First, the members of the Sanhedrin suffered from self deceit; Second the members of the Sanhedrin are up against the Holy Spirit and third the Sanhedrin must abide by the time and plan of the almighty God, they are helpless against it.

For us here this morning we learn several applicable things: We learn that the claims of the resurrection of Jesus and salvation by Jesus name alone are not new claims by Christians, nor are they somehow derived by fancy bible reading - look it is clear as day therein verse 12 - read it for yourself.

We also see that if we are placed in impossible situations, the Holy Spirit will be able to give us the words to express what needs to be expressed. In other words, God can give us words that are not our own; God will speak through us to accomplish His holy will.

Further, we learn that the truth can be told, events cannot be denied, great people can speak the words of the Holy Spirit and people will still not be able to believe. There are

many factors of why this is, but one of them is certainly God's timing. These powerful men did not believe for many reasons, but one of them is God's timing. See, persecution against the church has to begin so that the church will move out of a regional event and into a worldwide phenomenon.

So, Peter and John are arrested and put in jail. Why? The Captain of the Temple Guard, decided that Peter and John were causing a disturbance in the Temple, and that was that. The Captain of the Temple Guard, was a very powerful man, second only to high priest. He was in charge of order in the Temple. He the commander of the temple police and may have had misgivings about so large a crowd gathered in one area of the Temple. The Captain of the Temple Guard commanded a body of hand picked Levites who answered to him, like a small private army you might say.

Now their arrest has nothing to do with committing a crime. The simple fact is that because of the time of day there is no time to bring Peter and John before the authorities and so they are placed in jail overnight and will be brought before the Sanhedrin the next day. That is how an authoritarian government works. That is how the ancient world worked, people didn't have rights, they were at the mercy of their government. Peter and John are not charged with a crime - they are just people of interest....

Take quick note of verse 4 where we read that the number of believers had risen to about 5000. Note that that number of 5000 is only men. If we add to that number women, adolescents and children, the number would easily be over 10,000.

That is phenomenal. No wonder the Sanhedrin are meeting to see what this is all about. They had Jesus put to death and they thought that would be the end of it. Now a short time later instead of a handful of followers, Jesus has over 10,000 - and the numbers are quickly rising.

The number of senior members who arrive at the meeting show the seriousness of the situation. We see that, "Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family." (verse 6) These are powerful men who would not show up for a minor disturbance. These men are intelligent, highly educated and very, very powerful, they are the most powerful Jews in the kingdom.

The Sanhedrin was made up of the two parties of religious experts the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees are religious leaders who we see Jesus dealing most with, Jesus does not have many kind words for the Pharisees does He? However, Jesus was probably so hard on the Pharisees because they were the ones who had everything at their fingertips, but they just could not put it all together. Later, a good number of Pharisees do believe and become Christians.

The Sadducees. They probably got their name from Zadok, but which Zadok in Jewish history is not known. The Sadducees were upset at the notion of the possibility of resurrection from death back to life, saying it was a Pharisaic innovation. There is no surviving evidence of what Sadducees theology was or exactly what points they differed from Pharisees, but we do know that they only believed that the first five books of the bible were Scripture, where as the Pharisee party believed that the whole of the Hebrew bible was Scripture. A quick summary of the known differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees would be that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees did not.

I give all that background because the Pharisees would be on some level sympathetic to Peter and John because they are speaking for the concept of resurrection while the Sadducees would be outright hostile to Peter and John for the same reason.

As for the high Priests and their families, all high priests after Herod belonged to the Hasmonaeen political party. The Hasmonaeans were a respected Jewish political party who held a degree of power during Roman occupation. The High Priest and the Hasmonaeans would only continue to hold a high degree of political prerogative if Roman good will was behind them. Therefore they opposed religious or nationalistic aspirations which might incur the wrath of Rome. Peter and John have hints of trouble brewing for two reasons: First over 10,000 people are following this new Jewish order, that later is known as Christianity, and these people could potentially cause problems in the city and cause grief with the Roman government - so the Sanhedrin want to make sure trouble is stopped here and now. Second, these two men are claiming that the power of a dead man has healed a man lame for over 40 years, that theologically makes no sense to the Sadducees.

Peter and John are brought before a large open air meeting in the Temple area known for its polished floor called the Xystus. The Mishna describes it as the "hall of hewn stones."

Peter and John stand against the most powerful men of the land. These men want to know, "By what power and by what name did you do this?" They want to know by what power and name they healed the man.

Stop right there?

What does that question that the Sanhedrin ask tell you about the spiritual world? Now these men don't have it all together, but theologically at least, they have a lot of things right. These men all know what has happened is very real. They see the man, they all know who he is, they see the man standing in the meeting. The man who cannot stand, is standing right before their eyes. All theorizing and all philosophizing is over because there stands the man who cannot stand.

Now what do they ask? "By what power, by what name."

Folks, praying in the name of Jesus is not a cute Christian formality, the name of Jesus is not a formula at the end of prayer, the name of Jesus is not something we lightly throw around. The name of Jesus is powerful. See these men know how the spiritual world works, and let me assure you, they are certainly right on this point when they ask by what power and by what name.

Praying in the name of Jesus is not some kind of superstition, it is serious, and it is powerful. I myself have had the experience several times as pastor when I have prayed over a person in the name of Jesus, they were, like the man we read about today healed and made whole.

Again, as I say week after week, this is not about the Apostles, this is not about the church, this book of Acts is about Jesus Christ. These men are not ignorant, they ask the question that needs to be asked.

They don't accuse Peter and John of anything. They have no theories, they have no charges, they have nothing, they only have a very pregnant question, "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

Peter answers their question, straight up, verse 10, "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."

I believe there was heart rate acceleration among the Sanhedrin at that moment.

Then Peter piles it on with some exact biblical exegesis in verse 11, He is " 'the stone you builders rejected which has become the capstone.'" Everyone on the Sanhedrin knew exactly what Peter was saying. Peter was interpreting Scripture and saying that those gathered on the other side of the Xystus where the builders and they were the ones who rejected Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah, the savior of all.

Now hold on here. Remember Jesus' trial?

Again the high priest asked him, Mark 14:61b-64 "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. "

So here stand Peter and John before the same men who heard the testimony of Jesus Christ himself, and for that testimony they sentenced him to death. Yet, Peter and John claim the exact same thing - these these men can find no answer.....

See the way that Peter expresses his claim, he wraps it up in a theological package that not only made sense - but there was also no argument against it. Look, do the Sanhedrin fire back, "You are wrong in your exegetical interpretation of that Scripture?" No. They are blown away that such a complicated understanding can come from the minds of these two uneducated men standing before them.

The Peter throws his final zinger at them, 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."

The men Peter is addressing all believe one thing: Salvation is found in the name of Yahweh. They believe salvation is found in no other name, but the name of Yahweh. These men know all about the pagan religions of the day, and they dismiss them all, - and

don't fool yourself, Hinduism was also known in the middle east, these men would have dismissed Hinduism too.

So how come they do not dismiss what Peter says?

This is crazy isn't it? Look there in verse 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."

This is a very specific absolute denial of any other means of salvation than faith in Jesus. In the Greek it is a double negative which very heavily emphasizes the negative. This is not a mild maybe, or an I think so, or a possibly, or even a perhaps. This is, without a doubt, a very strong in no other name.

That's the correct translation from the Greek. I checked.

Parse that any way you want, that's what it says. Now, I know we have people here who believe a number of different things on this subject of salvation in the name of Jesus - I'm just saying.....this is what it says here. Do you believe what it says, or not?

And, let me throw in that the whole concept of it is right for me, but maybe not right for you would a completely foreign concept to all gathered in the Xystus - they would find it absurd.

These men do not know what to do with Peter and John. They meet privately and pretty much say that the evidence is standing right in front of them - what can they say? Nothing.

So wait a moment. The Sanhedrin by their discussion and lack of answers even claim that the evidence that all this is true is right in front of them, but they don't believe - Am I missing something?

These are they men who has all the education on the Scriptures, and their education was phenomenal on the Scriptures. These men know every nuance in the Hebrew Scriptures - what they know is this - they man was healed, and the name used was Jesus, and so the power was from the name of Jesus --- certainly they put all that together, yet still they do not believe.

Never underestimate the power of pride. Never underestimate the human capacity of self deception.

All you have to do is watch the first few episodes in a season of American Idol. In city after city people by the hundreds line up to try out, people who have absolutely no singing talent at all. Yet, if you have ever watched the show, when some people are turned down, they are bewildered, they are shocked, they believe they have been cheated by the judges and vow to somehow come back next year and prevail.

In my undergraduate degree in speech we learned how to use a person's pride against them in an argument. We were taught how to turn an argument against the opponent with a big ego. A person with a big ego, a person with a lot of pride is the easiest person to argue with - and win.

The key to using a person's pride against them is to trap them into a corner where they have to admit their ignorance on a subject. The trap is that to continue their line of reasoning they have to admit their ignorance; if they don't admit their ignorance they then can go no further in their current line of reasoning. It doesn't have to be a major thing, just something small, almost anything really, it doesn't even have to be related to the subject matter - all it has to do is create a situation where your opponent has to admit ignorance.

See the thing is, a prideful person will not be able to admit ignorance. Many times they will act unconsciously, but a prideful person they will do anything to protect their pride.

One of the ploys we used against a person who has a big ego is called the dimension argument. It is a meaningless ploy, but a person with a big ego will fall for it almost every time.

Whatever the subject is that we are talking about is irrelevant, I just say something like, "I see what your point is, but I am talking about it from a different dimension."

Now what I just said means absolutely nothing, talking about a different dimension doesn't mean a thing at all, but see, a person with a big ego, a person with a lot of pride will have to admit they don't know what I am talking about. They will have to say, "I don't

understand what you mean when you mean when you say you are talking about it from a different dimension?"

A person with a lot of pride will freeze at this point, you can see the wheels turning in their head and what is going on in their head is the same kind of decision we see the Sanhedrin making in our Scripture today. They have to admit they are wrong to even have a chance in winning the argument, and for a person with a big ego that is one of the most difficult things to do. So, every time they back away from the argument.

Here we see the same type of thing with the Sanhedrin. Their pride stops them cold. They see the evidence, they know the Scriptures, but their pride stops them from going further. They cannot answer without admitting they are wrong.

Perhaps it is their surprise at Peter's speaking ability. These men would be class snobs, Peter would have a strong accent since he was from Galilee. Galilee was considered backwoods Palestine, a place where a person would get a minimal education, it had no reputation for anything scholarly, it was just farm country. All those on the Sanhedrin are highly educated and experts on religious matters. Peter is giving a well reasoned argument that is theologically sound and is way beyond Peter's theological capacity - in fact it may be testing these men in their theological limits.

That my friends is the power of the Holy Spirit among us. Peter speaks, but the Holy Spirit is giving him the words to say. Again this is about the authority of Jesus.

Peter and John have committed no crime so the Sanhedrin try to intimidate.

I want to point out one more thing. God has a plan for the church and God has a plan of the Apostles and in that whole plan of God is God's timing. At this time if the whole Sanhedrin believed, then you can be fairly safe to say that Christianity would be solely a Jewish thing, for if the Jewish religious leaders all embraced Jesus Christianity may have had a very difficult time expanding outside of Palestine.

Let me end with this: Peter outright condemns the Sanhedrin for their part in the death of Jesus, but then, he offers them salvation. This is the crazy way God works. Even the ones who made sure that not only did Jesus die, but that he would die but the most painful means available - these very people are offered salvation.

You know what that says to us?

Whoever you are. Whatever you have thought, Whatever you have done or have not done. You most certainly didn't condemn Jesus to death. If Jesus can offer salvation to the ones who offended Jesus the most, if these men on the Sanhedrin can be saved, then you without a doubt can too.