



Discussion Notes

Temples and Cornerstones, Part 2 • Acts 4:5–22

January 18, 2026 • Kirsten Anonby

When you look around you... when you read the news and see the things happening in the world... when you look at what's going on among your friends and family... do you think that Jesus is winning? Do you think that the Kingdom of God is breaking into the world? Sometimes we can get overwhelmed when we look around at the darkness in our world — and it can feel like what we see around us are signs of death, rather than signs of life. That's why I love our story for today — it reminds me at a deep level — that the Kingdom of God IS breaking into world and is slowly but surely making things new.

The story that we're looking at is a long one, going from the beginning of chapter 3 to the end of chapter 4. Back in November we spent two weeks on the beginning of the story — when Peter says to a beggar who had been lame from birth, *"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."* (Acts 3:6). The man is immediately healed, and his response isn't quiet: he starts jumping up and down and praising God. As people come running from all sides to see what has happened, Peter answers their questions by telling them that this should not surprise them because of who Jesus was and is. And he makes it clear that this man has been healed in the **name of Jesus**.

The religious leaders and the temple guard, distressed by what they hear, arrest Peter and John. But the people are amazed at what they've seen and heard, and the number of believers swells to about 5,000 men (which means it's actually a lot more than that, if you count women and children).

That's where we left off — a bit of a cliff-hanger — you could say that we left poor John and Peter languishing in prison while we ate our Christmas mince pies. Let's pick up the story now in Acts 4:5–22

After a night in jail, Peter and John are brought before a group that are described as "the rulers, the elders, and the teachers of the law." This is the Sanhedrin — a group of 71 rabbis that function as a kind of Senate and Supreme Court in Israel. Although they are technically religious leaders — they also function politically — they're pretty much the only Jewish leaders that the nation has, while being occupied by Rome.

At the head of this group is Caiaphas, the current high priest, and Annas, a former high priest. Annas is Caiaphas's father-in-law, and five of his other sons also serve as high priest

— so their family has a kind of high priest dynasty. They're used to being in charge, and they're used to scrambling for whatever power that Rome will give them.

These are the same power brokers who arrested, tried, and sentenced Jesus to death, so when Peter and John stood before them it must have felt like a déjà vu moment. "Weren't we just here" I'm sure they wondered. "Didn't we just have this same kind of hearing?" Only that time it was in the middle of the night — a trial hastily cobbled together, so that the "Jesus" problem could be resolved before the Passover Sabbath began.

But here they are again, only now, instead of one Jesus, here are two of his followers. And they have just performed a miraculous healing in the **name of Jesus**. It would appear that even killing Jesus was not enough to put an end to what He started.

I would suggest that when we read about Peter and John standing in front of the Sanhedrin, that we are meant to think about Jesus' confrontations with these religious leaders. There is so much here that is the same: the religious leaders, the city, even the buildings. And it hasn't been that long since Jesus' death and resurrection. It may have been only a few months, at the most it's been a couple of years. Either way, the drama of Jesus' final days would have still been fresh in everyone's mind.

The nature of this conflict between the disciples and the religious leaders is also remarkably familiar. Throughout his ministry Jesus gets on the wrong side of the religious leaders because of who he healed, or when he healed them. Many times when crowds of people are praising God for Jesus' healings, the religious leaders are horrified and shocked because the healing was somehow a violation of the religious law.

This interaction is very similar. When the religious leaders interrogate Peter and John and ask "by what power or what name did you do this?" Peter says "If we are being called to account today for an act of **kindness** shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this... it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Peter points out that once again they have failed to rejoice in the goodness of God — that a man has been healed.

One of the most compelling connections, though, between Jesus' confrontations with the religious leadership and this moment, comes when Peter quotes Psalm 118. When Peter declares before the religious leaders that Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone," he is reminding them of two things:

First, he is reminding them of when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as a Messianic King — on the colt of a donkey — while the people quoted something else from Psalm 118 — "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Second, he is reminding them of the parable of the Tenants — a parable Jesus told in judgment of the Sanhedrin and their leadership of the Jewish people. At the end of that parable Jesus refers to himself as the cornerstone, rejected by the builders (the religious

leaders), but chosen by God. "Everyone," Jesus says, "who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." We're told that when Jesus said this "the teachers and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them."

Peter quoting this passage reminds them of Jesus' message in the parable: the day of the religious leaders is over, but Jesus is the cornerstone — the One whose Kingdom will never end. "Salvation is found in no one else," Peter says, "for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." (verse 12)

What's perfect about Peter quoting this passage here is that the religious leaders are in this moment experiencing the reality of Jesus as the Cornerstone, whose kingdom will never end. All of the scheming of the religious leaders were successful — they arrested Jesus, sentenced him, and he died. But they could not keep him from rising again.

And now here are two of Jesus' followers, doing the same kinds of miraculous healings that He did, and declaring that they were done in Jesus' name. The religious leaders have to face that despite them doing the absolute worst to Jesus — His Kingdom continues through these, commonplace, blue collar men, who insist with an eloquence that is not their own that the miraculous, the impossible, was done through the power of Jesus, in the name of Jesus.

After Peter speaks, the religious leaders are **astonished**. They're astonished because of Peter and John's courage. Most people, evidently, do not stand before the most powerful Jews in Jerusalem and declare what certainly would have been labeled as blasphemy. And most Galileean fishermen would not be able to speak with the skill that Peter demonstrates. We're told that they take note that Peter and John had been with Jesus.

But the religious leaders are also stuck. Notice that in verse 14 we are told that there was **nothing that they could say**. There are a few reasons for this:

The man who was healed is there at the hearing, bearing witness to his healing. And there were many witnesses to the healing. When the religious leaders confer together they say "What are we going to do with these men? Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it."

Biblical Scholar F.F. Bruce gives another reason why they have nothing to say. Notice, he points, out that the religious leaders don't even try to discredit the resurrection here. Peter has declared to their face that the Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified, was raised by God from the dead. If, Bruce points out, they had any means to discredit the resurrection — they would have done so here. The religious leaders desperately wanted the declaration of Jesus' resurrection to be shut down — especially the high priest and his family — who were all Sadducees and didn't even believe in the possibility of resurrection. Their silence on this point — their unwillingness to even try to refute this — reveals that there was no way

to do so — there was no body. The religious leaders can refute neither the healing of the lame man nor the resurrection of Jesus.

Since the religious leaders can't disprove the disciples' message, they resort to threatening Peter and John to keep them quiet — specifically they are commanded (note the strength of that word) not to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus. And this is where the Sanhedrin discover just how little power they have in the face of these rustic fishermen.

Peter and John say, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (verse 20)

This is one of the most spectacular declarations of faith. The disciples stand in front of the high priest, whose role is to stand before God as a representative of the people in the central part of the temple —the Holy of Holies. This was a man who had earthly power and who claimed to have spiritual power. But Peter and John look him in the eye and say that obeying him is **not** the same as obeying God. Because they know who God is — they had known him intimately ever since he had looked them in the eye and said "follow me."

You know, when I read about who Jesus is and what He does, I'm very aware that He is God and I am not. Particularly when I think of Jesus' arduous road to the cross, I'm aware that Jesus is doing something that only He could do. In the end, on Good Friday, everyone abandons Jesus — and He journeys to the cross alone. Jesus is fully human, but his obedience to his Father is complete, in a way mine will never be in this life. I try to follow Him — but I'm very aware that I'm sinful — that, even with the help of the Spirit, I follow Jesus with a limp.

Part of what I think is so powerful about our text for today is that it shows us Peter and John standing where Jesus stood — before the Sanhedrin — and following in His steps. And this is helpful for us — because, while none of us are first century apostles who were a part of Jesus' inner circle while he lived on earth — still — the gap between these guys and us is quite a bit smaller than the gap between us and Jesus. Peter and John are also broken human beings trying to follow Jesus — just like us. And it's important that we don't lose sight of that. They are not superheroes; they're people — the same people we get to know in the biographies of Jesus.

At the same time, something has changed. Peter and John are not the same men who fled in the garden when Jesus was arrested. Peter is no longer the man who, when accused of being with Jesus, denied him three times. Now, Peter and John boldly declare who Jesus is — and the religious leaders take note that they had been with Jesus. Let's briefly talk about why they're able to face the religious leaders with such boldness and confidence.

First, Peter and John are equipped and filled with the Holy Spirit. In a very real way, they know that they are not alone, that the presence of Jesus is with them in the room. Verse 8 tells us that Peter is filled with the Spirit when he opens his mouth to speak, indicating

that he is being uniquely equipped to proclaim the truth about Jesus with clarity and boldness. This is a fulfillment of the promise Jesus makes in Luke 21 when he says, *“you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”* — Luke 21:12b–15

Instructions like what I just read from Luke 21 also would have meant that the disciples wouldn't have been surprised to find themselves in a situation like this. You can imagine Peter and John sitting in jail, reminding each other, “Jesus said this was going to happen.” Rather than fearing that things had gone wrong with their arrest and chastisement — Peter and John would have had a fundamental confidence that things had gone right. They have been prepared for this — and they would have seen it as a chance to fulfill their calling to be His witnesses.

If you think back to the beginning of Acts, you'll remember that when Jesus tells his disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit, he says “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and to the ends of the earth.” — Acts 1:8. One of the things that is really standing out to me as we study Acts together, is just how central this is to our identity as followers of Jesus. The disciples knew that they were called to be witnesses — and everything else they did flowed out of this central call to share what they had seen — to bear witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus. I think this clarity and simplicity of purpose gave them confidence — they didn't have a strategic master plan for church growth (the Spirit had that) all they had to do was to bear witness. And that's what Peter and John do in this story. They knew when they were standing before the Sanhedrin that they were right in the middle of the will of God.

And they know they are on the winning side. And this is key. When I think of the disciples at the point of the crucifixion, I see that their world has been rocked because it seemed like Jesus had lost. Even after his initial resurrection appearances it took time for the disciples to all fully understand that the death that seemed like a complete defeat was in reality the ultimate victory for the plans and purposes God. After they realized, though, the victory that Jesus won over sin and death — and after they experienced the filling and indwelling of the Spirit — it seems that a confidence in God's victory grounded itself in their hearts. And they seemed to grow in their understanding that things like imprisonment or persecution didn't necessarily mean that things were going wrong. It often was an opportunity for the Spirit to more fully make things right.

I believe that this confidence is grounded in the most accurate picture of the world — and it's the picture that we need to hold on to. Things haven't changed. The Kingdom of God is still advancing into our world — and it is still greater than all the darkness that we sense around us. In every generation, the Spirit is at work revealing Jesus, and renewing and restoring the world. In every generation our hope is grounded in the fact that the Kingdom of God is not fragile — it's resilient and strong. And in the end, God wins.

If you ever go to Chuckie Cheese, every parent's favourite restaurant, you might get to play the arcade game called "Whack a Mole". Have you ever seen that one? Each time a mole sticks his head out of his hole, you're supposed to whack him with a hammer, but there's always another mole popping up somewhere else. That's what the Kingdom of God is like. Just when the darkness thinks it's got us, we pop up somewhere else. The Spirit is constantly on the move, and we move with Him. Don't let the darkness daunt you. The Kingdom of God always springs up somewhere new — vibrant and alive.

"See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness

and streams in the wasteland." — Isaiah 43:19

I think this story is an invitation to trust Jesus. Peter and John knew whose they were — they knew that they would follow Him wherever He would lead them. When we give Jesus our hearts — when we trust Him. He is able to do great things in and through us — not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

I know that I make my walk with Jesus about so much more than simple trust, but in the end it's that trust that enables us to follow Jesus where he's leading us. It's trust that enables us to walk towards what scares us with a confidence that God's got us. It's trust that gives us the courage to open our mouths to speak — to witness in even hostile settings to who Jesus is what He has done.

I have very human responses to the brokenness in my world. Darkness scares me — difficulty and hardship scare me. But when I look at those things through the lens of the book of Acts, I can begin to see them as ways in which Jesus reveals His glory.

Be encouraged, Jesus wins, and He's got you.



Discussion Questions

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Engage:

- Read Acts 4:5–22. At your initial reading, what stands out to you about the text? What questions do you have about the text?

Observation and Interpretation:

- How does our text for today relate to what has already happened in the first three chapters of Acts?
- Who are the people in this story, and what do you think is important to remember about them?
- Peter quotes Psalm 118:22 in his sermon. This psalm is both quoted by the people praising Jesus during his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:37–40) and by Jesus when he challenges the religious leaders with the Parable of the Tenants (Luke 20:9–19). Look back over these passages from Luke: what do you think Peter is saying to the religious leaders?
- Why is it important to both the religious leaders and to Peter and John that this man was healed in the name of Jesus?
- What do you think enables Peter and John to respond the way they do to the religious' leaders arrests and threats? What is challenging or encouraging about their response?
- Look at verses 13–21. Why do the Jewish religious leaders seem to be unable to control the situation with Peter and John?

Application

- What is your key take-away from this passage?
 - Anything that you feel is important for you to understand or believe?
 - Anything that God wants me to desire or do in response to this passage?
- Pray for each other.