

What's the Message – Lesson 109

In today's lesson we see the growth of the Church in Jerusalem, and the rise of opposition to it.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we pray today in the name of Jesus, that You would strengthen us through Your Holy Spirit. And we ask, as did the disciples in Jerusalem, that You would enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness that the name of Jesus might be glorified. Amen.

Last time we saw the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the outburst of growth of the first Christian Church in Jerusalem. Today we see a continuation of that growth as the result of a miracle of healing, and the opposition of the Jewish leaders increase. We begin with these words from Acts, chapter three:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, Look at us! So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Taking him by the hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

As you can imagine, this caused quite a stir. The people who had carried the crippled man for years knew this was the same man who had never been able to stand, let alone walk. Other people in the temple courts recognized him as well. All knew that a miracle had

happened, and they looked to Peter and John as the ones who performed it. But Peter deflected their praises, and told them it was not the power of men who had performed this miracle, it was the power of Jesus, the very same one the Jews had turned over to Pilate to be crucified. And now Peter preached his second sermon, this time to a curious crowd that had gathered around them in the temple court because of a miracle that all could see. He told them how Jesus had been promised by the prophets of old, yet rejected by the very people He had come to save.

So first Peter blasts them with the law, and tells them: *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.* And what was the result of this episode? *Many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.* But the temple guard seized Peter and John, and put them in jail for the night.

The next day the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ... They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

What courage! What boldness to speak in this manner to the very same men who had Jesus crucified, and accuse them of killing the very Messiah who had been sent to save Israel! Hardly a diplomatic way to speak to the leaders of the Jewish nation. But what could these rulers say in their defense? They could not deny that a miracle

had happened. There were too many who knew this man who had been crippled from birth, and here he was, standing right there before them! Recall that in the Sanhedrin the majority were Sadducees, and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Yet, here were uneducated fishermen from Galilee proclaiming that the Jesus they had crucified was not only raised from the dead, but that it was through His power and in His name that this former cripple was standing before them, healed. To the Sadducees this was almost a declaration of war! The proclamation of these men must be stopped! So they had Peter and John taken away, while they plotted together what they could do to silence them.

Then (the Sanhedrin) called (the Disciples) in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” After further threats, (the rulers) let them go. They could not decide how to punish (the Disciples), because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

And after their release, did Peter and John curl up in the safety of silence, and stop telling others about Jesus? Of course not. Together with the other faithful followers of Jesus, they joined in prayer, praising God and asking: *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your Word with great boldness.*

As Dr. Braun has pointed out, “It is important to note what they did not ask for. They asked for power, but not protection ... for the mission to go forward, but not that it would be made easy ... not that God would destroy their enemies, but that God would make them bold witnesses to their enemies.” It is the example for us to follow, today.

Next time we will have a special Easter message about the empty tomb.