**Enter the Big Shots**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 A young man who thought of himself as quite the big shot decided to start his own business. He began by renting a big, *beautiful* office, and furnishing it with all the latest office equipment. And as he sat behind his huge desk on his first day of business, he saw a man enter his outer office. Hoping to impress his very first customer, and look like a real big shot in front of him, he picked up the phone, and pretended to be in the middle of a *humungous* business deal. I mean, he threw figures around, and made some gigantic proposals. Finally, he hung up the phone and said to the man, “Now what can I do for *you?”* To which the man replied, “I’m here to connect your phone lines.”

 Well, if you know your Bible, you know that the religious leaders in Israel *also* liked to think of themselves as big shots. They were always parading around in long robes (Luke 20:46), trying to convince people that they were all that. And when the Lord Jesus Christ came along, and was more popular than they were, they had Him *crucified.* Then, after He rose from the dead, those big shots went after the apostles who were *preaching* Christ, as we see in the first two verses of our text here in Acts 4:1-12:

 **“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,**

 **“Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”**

Now to begin with, you’ll notice that there were three groups of people here who were grieved at what the apostles were teaching, and I think they all had their own personal beefs. Let’s start with the priests, since they’re mentioned first. It was the job of the priests *to teach the people the Word of God,* as we see when God told the very *first* priest:

**“…the LORD spake unto Aaron, saying…*teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses*” (Leviticus 10:8-11).**

So the beef that the priests had with the apostles was that they didn’t like the fact that *somebody else* was teaching the people. I mean, after all, that was *their* job! And the fact that the apostles were preaching *Jesus* didn’t help, for they were none too fond of Him, as we know from the four gospels.

 Next, Verse 1 says that someone called “the captain of the temple” had a beef with what the apostles were teaching. He was kind of a *soldier* whose office in the temple was established by a priest named Jehoiada:

**“Jehoiada…took the *captains* of hundreds…And he said unto them…*let none come into the house of the LORD, save the priests*…they shall go in, for they are holy… Moreover Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds *spears, and bucklers, and shields”* (II Chronicles 23:1-9).**

As you can see, the purpose of these captains was to ensure that only the priests entered the temple. And when Jehoiada issued *weapons* to those captains, that tells you how *serious* he was about it.

 But these captains ended up getting used for *other* purposes, as we see when Israel’s religious leaders came to arrest the Lord:

**“Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, *and captains of the temple,* and the elders, which were come to Him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, *with swords and staves?”* (Luke 22:52).**

As you can see, Israel’s religious leaders had begun to use the temple captains as what the Mafia used to call “the muscle,” forcing them to become the enforcers who carried out their will. And when the apostles preached Christ, it made these captains look bad, since they’d been involved in the Lord’s arrest, as we just witnessed in Luke 22:52. And that’s why *they* had a beef with what the apostles were teaching.

And “the Sadducees” (Acts 4:1) were unhappy with what the apostles were teaching, for we read of them,

**“…*the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection*, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23:8).**

Since the Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead, you can easily understand why *they* were grieved when the apostles “preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

 Now this marks a change from how things were when the Lord was here on the earth. During His sojourn in Israel, He got most of *His* grief from *the Pharisees,* for as the Lord Himself pointed out, “…the Pharisees *sit in Moses' seat…”* (Mt. 23:2). The Pharisees preferred Moses to the Lord (Jo.9:16,28) because He was always healing people on the sabbath, and Moses said to keep the sabbath holy. They wrongly interpreted that to mean that it was wrong to heal someone on the sabbath. And this made the Lord persona non grata in their eyes.

 And so it was the Pharisees who were *primarily* responsible for the Lord’s arrest and death, as we see when John describes the Lord’s arrest, saying:

**“Judas then, having received a band of men and officers *from the chief priests and Pharisees*, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:3).**

But once the Lord died and rose again, and the apostles began to *preach* that He died and rose again, the Sadducees became God’s chief opponents, since they didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead. So we’re going to be seeing more of them in our upcoming studies in the Book of Acts.

 But before we move on in our text, did you notice that Verse 2 says that the apostles preached “the resurrection *from* the dead”? Is that different from what we read in Matthew 22:31, where the Lord spoke about “the resurrection *of* the dead”? Perhaps you are thinking, “What’s the difference?”

 Well, resurrection *from* the dead refers to someone who rose from the dead and the rest of the dead *stayed dead.* For instance, after the Lord raised His friend Lazarus from the dead, we read that “Lazarus was…raised *from* the dead” (John 12:1). You may remember how the Lord stood at the edge of the cemetery and cried, “*Lazarus,* come forth” (John 11:43). Had He not specified “Lazarus” here, they’d have *all* come forth, and He would have emptied the cemetery! So Lazarus was raised *from* the dead, out from *among* the dead, who remained in the grave.

 But someday there’s coming some resurrections *of* the dead. All of us will rise at the Rapture. All the saved in Israel will rise at the Second Coming of Christ. And all the unsaved of all ages will rise at the Great White Throne judgment.

 And the reason I took the time to point that out is to remind you of how *carefully* and *accurately* your Bible is written. Hey, you’ve staked *your eternal life* on the words of this Book! And you look to it to direct you in every detail of your life—or at least you should! Doesn’t it make you feel good to know that God pays attention to *every word,* right down to the difference between the “of”s and the “from”s.

 Now by the way, do you know *why* the Sadducees didn’t like the idea that the dead will rise? It’s the same reason a lot of *other* people don’t like it. Look what Peter said about *the Lord’s* resurrection in Acts 10:40,42:

 **“Him God raised up the third day…And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God *to be the Judge of quick and dead.”***

The Sadducees didn’t like it when the apostles preached that Christ had risen because God raised Him to be the *judge* of the living and the dead. In other words, they didn’t like it because they didn’t like the idea of getting *judged.* They’d probably heard the Lord say,

 **“For the Father judgeth no man, *but hath committed all judgment unto the Son*…And hath given Him authority to execute judgment…because He is the Son of man” (John 5:22,27).**

Now if you are wondering why God committed all judgment to the Son, it’s because if the Father judged men, they could say, “You don’t know what it was like to be tempted to sin. It was pretty hard down here, you know!” They could say that to the Father, but not to “the Son of man,” who lived 33 years among sinners and never once yielded to the temptation to sin.

 But if men thought that killing the Lord meant they killed their judge, and would never have to be judged for their sins, they had another thing comin,’ as Paul tells us in Acts 17:30,31:

**“God…hath appointed a day, *in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained;* whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, *in that He hath raised Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30,31).**

Paul is saying, as it were, “If you thought you killed your judge and won’t ever be judged, you can forget about that, because after you killed Him *God raised Him!”*

 Now if you’re not saved, you needn’t fear being judged, for the Lord *took* your judgment when He died for you on the cross. If you’ll just *believe* that He bore the judgment that you deserved to bear, God will save you. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

 Before we leave these first few verses in our text, you’ll notice that Verse 1 begins by telling us that all of this happened “as” the apostles were speaking the things they were speaking in Chapter 3. And if you’ve been following along with our studies in Acts, you know that Peter has just finished offering the kingdom of heaven on earth to the people of Israel (3:19-21). So what you’re reading here in Chapter 4 is the *response* of Israel’s leaders to that offer. They were *grieved* at the thought that the king they crucified was still alive, and still wanting to give Israel a kingdom in which He Himself would be the king.

 And their response to God’s offer of the kingdom gets even *worse* as we read on in our text:

 **“And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide” (Acts 4:3).**

 Now “eventide” is just an old word for *evening,* which began at 6 p.m. Since Peter healed the lame man at the “ninth hour” (Acts 3:1), or 3 p.m., that means Peter’s been preaching for the better part of *three hours* now. Think about *that* the next time your pastor preaches a little longer than usual!

 Now when it says that they put the apostles “in hold,” that means they threw them in jail, of course. Now we see why the captain of the temple was invited to this confrontation. He was being used as “the muscle” again. He was probably sporting those weapons that Jehoiada had authorized him to carry, weapons which he no doubt used to take the apostles into custody.

 But now if you think the apostles were *surprised* at their invitation to the gray bar hotel, think again, for the Lord had warned them,

 **“*Remember the word that I said unto you,* The servant is not greater than his lord. *If they have persecuted Me,* *they will also persecute you…”* (John 15:20).**

Now here we have to ask why the Lord would say that “the servant is not greater than his lord” in this context. But the reason they persecuted the Lord was that *He told them the truth,* and they didn’t want to *hear* the truth. So He told the apostles, as it were, “If *you* preach the truth, they are going to persecute you too—unless you can figure out how to teach the truth in a way that won’t anger them.” But if they could figure *that* out, *they’d be greater than the Lord was,* for He couldn’t figure it out. And the reason *He* couldn’t figure it out is because *it can’t be done.* Men don’t *like* the truth of God!

 And it almost goes without saying that if *you* go around sharing Bible truth, you’re going to be none too popular either. So let the Lord’s warming warn you too.

 But when the apostles remembered what the Lord said there, they weren’t surprised when they got arrested here in Acts 4. They just thought, “If it was good enough for the Lord, then it’s good enough for us!” It is said that when they went to crucify Peter years later that he exclaimed, “Not like my Lord, I’m not worthy!” And he insisted that they crucify him *upside down.* That’s just a legend that isn’t recorded in the Bible, so we can’t know that for sure, of course. But we can be sure the apostles didn’t *care* that they were arrested; not after they heard what we read in the next verse in our text:

 **“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).**

Now when it says that 5,000 “men” believed, that means that thousands *more* in their families probably *also* believed. Head counts in those days usually just focused on the head of the family. And this means that Israel’s rulers may not have liked what the apostles were preaching, but it was a big hit with the people!

 And don’t forget, this 5,000 is *in addition* to the results we saw earlier in Acts 2, where after Peter finished speaking we read,

 “**Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).**

Now this means the apostles were getting *way* more results than the Lord did when He was here. But this didn’t surprise the apostles. Not because they thought they were beter preachers than He was, of course, but because the Lord had predicted this too!

 **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: *but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”* (John 12:24).**

Now that word “corn” here just means *seed.* That’s the first definition of the word in my old Webster’s dictionary, and this shows how our language changes over the years.

 And while I don’t know much about farming, even I know that if you keep a seed alone and never plant it, it will *abide* alone *forever.* But if you plant it in the ground, a kernel of corn will bring forth about 1600 *more* kernels, around 800 per ear, two ears per stalk. I’d call that bearing a lot of fruit, wouldn’t you?

 When the Lord was here, He ministered the Word for three years. And after that intense three year ministry, only 120 believers gathered in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:15). But after the “seed” of the Lord died, was buried, and rose again, the apostles reaped *8,000 men in one day.* I’d call *that* a lot of fruit as well, wouldn’t you?

 And what you’re seeing here is just a *sampling* of the awesome victory that God is going to win over the devil someday because of what Christ did on the cross. Look what it says about the Lord in that famous chapter *about* the cross in Isaiah 53:11,12:

**“…by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. *Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong;* because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and…bare the sin of many…” (Isaiah 53:11,12).**

Now that word “spoil” there isn’t talking about the kind of spoiling that you grandparents do to your grandkids! Have you ever heard the expression “the spoils of war”? When a nation conquers another nation, they are entitled to *spoil* it by looting and plundering their riches and valuables. And in ancient times, that included their *people.* You’ll remember when Babylon conquered Israel, Daniel and his three Hebrew companions were taken captive as part of the spoils of war.

 Well, when Adam sinned, Satan got the victory *over him,* and *spoiled him* of all his possessions in the world, *and of all his descendants.* And ever after that, every person born into the world *legally* belonged to the devil, for he’d won the victory over Adam and all of Adam’s progeny were his lawful captives as the spoils of war.

 But as you know, God had a plan to take the family of man *back,* a plan He talked about in Isaiah 49:24,25:

**“Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, *or the lawful captive delivered?* But thus saith the LORD, *Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,* and the prey of *the terrible* shall be delivered…*and I will save thy children”***

Satan is a “mighty” and “terrible” and “great” (Isa. 53:12) adversary, but after Christ paid the price to redeem us, God forced him to *divide* the spoil he took from Adam. He gets to keep all who won’t believe, but the Lord gets to keep all who *will* believe. God *divided the spoil with the strong,* as Isaiah put it, and gave the Lord his “portion.”

Now it’s true that Isaiah was *primarily* talking about taking the *Jews* back from Nebuchadnezzar, who spoiled the people of Israel when he conquered them. He’s the one who the Bible calls “the terrible,” as we see when Ezekiel told his people,

**“The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon thee…*the terrible of the nations”* (Ezekiel 32:11,12).**

When Isaiah said that “the prey of the terrible shall be delivered,” you should know that God wasn’t doing anything wrong in delivering Israel from Nebuchadnezzar. You see, the people of Israel *paid for* their redemption with 70 years of captivity. They owed God for 70 years of Sabbaths that they didn’t keep, and when they paid Him back, *they were free to go home.*

But that’s just a picture of how God had every right to deliver *believers* after Christ paid for *their* redemption on the cross, as He Himself said in Matthew 12:28,29:

**“…if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, *and spoil his goods,* except he first bind the strong man? *and then he will spoil his house”***

When the Lord “repossessed” the people who had been possessed by the devil, that was a picture of how He later repossessed *the souls* of all who believe. All because His corn of wheat had died for them, and brought forth much fruit!

 Now you probably never thought of yourself as the spoils of war, but God says you are! You’re the spoils of the most epic battle in history, the battle that Christ won over Satan at the cross, when He *spoiled* him of his spoils among men.

 **“And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,**

 **“And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem” (Acts 4:5,6).**

Now Annas and Caiaphas were *both* high priests in Israel (Lu. 3:2), probably because they were related, and were the office was in transition. We know they were related, for when they arrested the Lord, we read:

**“…the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound Him… And led Him away to Annas first; *for he was father in law to Caiaphas*, which was the high priest that same year” (John 18:12,13).**

When Peter mentions their “kindred” here (v. 6), that tells you that *the whole family* was involved in killing the Lord. It was a family affair!

 Now we don’t know anything about “Alexander” or “John,” but we know that they all had a question for the apostles, one that they asked in Acts 4:7:

 **“And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?”**

Now when they ask “by what *power”* the apostles had healed the lame man, they didn’t mean to ask, “How did you *empower* his legs to be able to walk? How did you make his legs start working again?” When they *also* asked “by what *name”* they had done it, that defines the word “power” there as *authority,* a meaning it has oftentimes in the Bible. Paul called the leaders in government “the powers that be” (Rom. 12:1) because our leaders have *authority* over us.

 And the reason these religious leaders asked that question is that they thought *they* were the authority in Israel, and they knew they hadn’t given any authority to the apostles to heal anyone. As you can see, they were what we’d today call “control freaks”!

 Now it’s obvious that the apostles are on trial here. Of course, that begs the question, “What’s the charge?” And that’s a question that Peter wanted answered as well! Because, as you may have noticed, when they asked by what authority “ye have done *this,”* they don’t specify what “this” was. Imagine getting arrested without being charged, getting thrown in jail, then appearing in court, only to hear the judge ask, “How do you plead to *this?”* That kind of thing wouldn’t be allowed in our courts today!

 Of course, you know *why* they weren’t very specific. The apostles were being charged with *healing the lame man!* And Peter was savvy enough to call them on it, as we see as we read on in our text:

 **“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,**

**“If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole.**

**“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:8-10).**

Peter says, as it were, “Are you charging us *with doing a good deed?”* I’m sure there were some faces that were red with embarrassment as the apostle pointed out the *madness* of their indictment!

 Before we consider his defense, however, I need to point out that when it says Peter was “filled with the Holy Ghost,” this is an example of how God always keeps His Word. You see, the Lord had *promised* the apostles that when they were interrogated by rulers that they’d be able to answer *by the Holy Spirit:*

**“…*when they bring you unto the synagogues,* and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: *For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say”* (Luke 12:11,12).**

Now if you envy that ability to answer men with words that come from the mind of the Spirit, I don’t blame you. I mean, if they ever put me on trial for preaching Christ, I’d like to be able to answer by just opening my mouth and having the very words of God just pop out of my mouth and roll off my tongue.

 But your apostle Paul says that we have something that will work just as well, something we read about in Colossians 4:6:

**“*Let your speech be alway with grace,* seasoned with salt, *that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”***

Now notice it doesn’t say that you’ll always know *what* to answer every man. God doesn’t promise us that, as He did the apostles. But if your speech is alway with grace, you’ll always know *how* to answer them.

 Now if you’re thinking that that’s not as good, I’d submit to you that *how* you say something is just as important as *what* you say, especially when you are on trial for your faith—and we’re *always* on trial for our faith before the world. It is just as important to answer people *graciously* as it is to answer them *accurately.*

But as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you, that “always” part in Colossians 4:6 is the hard part. It’s *hard* to let your speech be *alway* with grace. But if your speech is always with *crabbiness—*except when you go to answer someone about your faith, people can see right through that. And if you tell people that you’re rich in Christ, but you’re always complaining about how poor you are, they can see through that too! And if you openly declare that God’s grace is sufficient for you, but you’re always griping about your health, they can see through *that* as well.

 If you’re thinking about how hard it is to let your speech be *alway* with grace, do you know what would be even harder than knowing *how* to answer every man? Knowing *what* to answer them! Aren’t you glad God didn’t say you had to do that? Listen, no Christian on the planet always knows *what* to answer men. But every one of us ought to know *how* to answer them.

 When we look at Verse 10 of our text, Peter shows that he never read that old book, “How To Win Friends And Influence People,” for he’s saying all the things that he knows they don’t want to hear! He knows they despise Nazareth (John 1:46), but he refers to the Lord as “Jesus of Nazareth.” He knows they don’t like to be reminded that they crucified their messiah, and he knows the Sadducees don’t like hearing that God raised Him from the dead *after* they crucified Him. But Peter goes ahead and punches all those buttons anyway! No wonder Luke goes on to remark about the “boldness” of the apostles (v.13).

 As we read on, we see Peter *also* show that he was paying attention to the things the Lord taught the apostles when He was here among them, for he went on to reply to their charge by saying,

 **“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner” (Acts 4:11).**

If you know your Bible, you know that *that’s the same thing the Lord said* when they asked *Him* by what authority He did things!

**“…the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him as He was teaching, and said, *By what authority doest Thou these things and who gave Thee this authority*...Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner…*?” (Matthew 21:23-42).**

After the Lord was asked to cite the authority for *His* actions, He told a parable or two, then quoted the same verse Peter quoted from Psalm 118! That was His way of telling them that He got His authority *from God the Father,* who sent Him to be the cornerstone of the kingdom church. He knew that all the Jews in His audience would be familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah 28:16:

**“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, *Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone,* a tried stone, a precious corner stone, *a sure foundation…”***

God the Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ to be the *foundation* stone of the kingdom church. The “builders” in Israel were Israel’s *leaders.* They were the ones who were supposed to recognize their Messiah, and build the kingdom church upon His foundation. If instead they *rejected* the Lord, and *refused* to build the kingdom church on Him, the Lord went on to predict what would happen:

**“And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: *but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder”* (Matthew 21:44).**

Even today, if you reject the Lord instead of believing on Him, you have God’s word on it that someday He will grind you to powder.

 Now in our last verse, we see that God the Father didn’t exactly give Israel their choice of foundation stones:

 **“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).**

Now we use this verse today to say that there’s no salvation in Buddha, or Mohammed, or Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, and so on, and that’s all true. But that’s not what Peter was getting at here. He wasn’t saying that there’s no salvation in the name of Caesar, who was worshipped as a god in Rome in those days, or in the name of Zeus or Jupiter or any of the other Roman gods. The Jews to whom Peter was speaking would know better than to believe that there might be salvation in any of those false gods!

 No, you see, they had asked Peter “by what name” or authority he had healed the lame man, and Peter is answering by saying that he healed him *by the authority of the Lord,* as opposed to any authority from Israel’s rulers! As we’ll see later in this study, they had 40 years to heal that lame man, and they couldn’t!

 And you’ll notice that Peter segued the discussion of physical healing into the subject of eternal salvation here. That’s because when the Lord was able to *heal* the man, that proved He was able to *save* him.

 Now if you’re not sure how that works, look what the Lord said after He told a man who couldn’t walk that his sins were forgiven, and the Jews didn’t like it, saying that only God could forgive sins. The Lord replied by asking them,

**“For whether is easier, to say, *Thy sins be forgiven thee;* or to say, *Arise, and walk?”* (Matthew 9:5).**

Now if you think about it, that’s kind of a trick question. You see, it’s easier to *say* “thy sins be forgiven,” for after someone says that, *you can’t see if they’re forgiven or not.* But if you tell a man who can’t walk to rise up and walk, you *can* see that! That’s why the Lord went on to say,

**“*But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,* (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) *Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.* And he arose, and departed to his house” (Matthew 9:6,7).**

Did you follow that? The Lord did what they could *see* to prove that He did what they *couldn’t* see.

And that’s what Peter is saying here in Acts 4:12. He’s saying that the Lord Jesus is not only the only one who can heal a man who was lame from his mother’s womb, He’s *also* the only one who could save him from his sins as well.