

ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS

LESSON TOPIC

PERSECUTED FOR JESUS NAME

SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 4: 1-22.

MEMORY VERSE: ACTS 4:11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

LESSON INTRODUCTION:

This chapter and lesson is a continuation of the previous chapter and the healing of the lame man. This was an outstanding miracle and no one could deny it. When the apostles explained the miracle by attributing it entirely to faith in the name of Jesus, it stirred bitter animosity among the rulers of the Jews. The apostles had preached the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and through him a resurrection for all who believed in him.

They were apprehended and jailed over night. The next day they held an inquiry as to how they had healed this lame man. The apostles, disavowing any power of their own, declared forth rightly that it was through the name of Jesus that the lame man was healed. Further, they added, there is salvation in no other name but the name of Jesus. The Jews were not grieved over the miracle as much as over the preaching of a resurrection through faith in the name of Jesus. After all, they had crucified him and he was dead. They threatened the apostles not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, to which the apostles adamantly refused to listen.

This miracle on a 40 year old man, was so obvious and powerful, they had no choice but to let them go. What the rulers could not see was that three powerful things were working to advertise the name of Jesus: the miracle, the message and the persecution. God was using all of this to establish and further the gospel. By their failure to recognize Christ as their Messiah, they had put themselves against God. Their agony and grief is a result of their rejection of him, and they struck back out of religious rage, defeat and unbelief.

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS

MONDAY – ACTS 4:1-3. GRIEF OVER THE RESURRECTION.

SCRIPTURE.

V1. And as they spake unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the

resurrection from the dead. 3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

COMMENTS.

The religious leaders were grieved that they preached through Jesus the resurrection. If Jesus, whom they had crucified, was raised from the dead, it completely destroyed their entire religious traditions. The very name of Jesus, applied to this "Galilean imposter" was an affront and a blasphemy to them. They knew full well that the name of Jesus was in reality "Jehovah", the name of the Hebrew God, with the addition of "yasha"; savior or salvation added to it. Thus they perceived of Jesus as making himself God. He was not just making himself God, he was God.

TUESDAY – 4:4. A MULTITUDE OF CONVERSIONS.

SCRIPTURE

V4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed: and the number of the men was about five thousand.

COMMENTS.

A multitude of people are being converted by faith in Christ. The priests could not see Jesus as their savior because of their prejudice; but the general population could. This meant that their people were turning from their hypocritical traditions and believing in the Lord. This was happening because God was working in the hearts and minds of people.

WEDNESDAY – ACTS 4:5-12. JESUS IS BECOME THE CORNERSTONE.

SCRIPTURE.

V5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6. 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. 7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, by what power, or by what name, have ye done this? 8. Then Peter filled with the Holy Ghost said unto them, ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole: 10. 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. 11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Comments.

This Jesus which they had rejected and crucified was the cornerstone of all that had been done. They had rejected the cornerstone of their faith handed down from their father Abraham. He was the

cornerstone of Abraham's faith; of the Law of Moses; of all that the prophets taught, and of countless types and shadows throughout their history. To miss this was to be blind spiritually.

THURSDAY – ACTS 4:13-18. THREATS DO NOT STOP THE GOSPEL.

SCRIPTURE.

V13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16. Saying, what shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

COMMENTS.

The rulers dared to threaten the preaching in Jesus name and the message of his resurrection. It disavowed all of their traditions and proved them totally ignorant of all of God's great promises of his salvation. This was more than they could take.

FRIDAY – ACTS 4:19-22. NO FAULT FOUND IN THEM.

SCRIPTURE.

V19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge ye. 20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

COMMENTS.

Two "ignorant fisherman" defy the religious leaders. Who were these untutored fishermen telling the "rabbis" of the law, who had studied it daily, that they were wrong about Jesus? God has always used the small, insignificant things, and things which do not appear to have the ability to do God's will, to empower and do his work. This is so that no flesh shall be able to glory in his presence and God will get the glory himself.

LESSON STUDY AND DISCUSSION.

V1. The apostles are confronted by angry religious leaders. These are the leaders that rule in the temple and have the advantage of a “reputation” of being the authority of God.

V2. Their problem: Jesus and the resurrection were being preached. This absolutely destroyed their entire religious empire.

V3. They put Peter and John in Jail because of what they were preaching. Why is the message of the resurrection of Christ, and through him, a resurrection for all who believe in him, so despised?

V4. Already the church has grown to several thousand believers. The people hear and believe the message of a risen Lord, while the rulers are angry, power-hungry unbelievers.

V5-7. Where did you get the power to preach this doctrine? Well, they got it from being taught by Christ himself for 3 ½ years and by the power of the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

V8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said ----- . It was not just an ignorant fisherman expressing his religious views, but it was a man empowered by the Spirit of God passionately telling the story of Jesus.

V9-10. By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, is this man healed. What else could they say? They knew that they did not have the power to perform such a miracle as this. So they give glory to God. God always gets blamed for things he does not do and seldom gets the credit for the things that he does do.

V11. The (religious) builders have rejected this chief corner stone. They have so completely put Jesus and his resurrection right at the heart of all that they have preached and all that God has done, that it serves to glorify God, cause the people to rejoice and believe and the rulers to writhe in anguish and hatred.

V12. There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved. The name of Jesus = Jehovah-yasha: Jehovah savior. The God of the Old Testament, whose name was Jehovah, has come HIMSELF to bring salvation to all the world. There is no other name.

V13-14. The rulers have a dilemma: how to discredit the apostles and account for the miracle. That is still the dilemma today. The dilemma is removed when you believe the apostles message and give glory to God for what is done in his name.

V15-18. The elders make it clear that they do not like the apostles’ doctrine, so they threaten them not to teach it any more. They would have been satisfied if the apostles would have been more “tolerant” and allowed that the great Jewish leaders and their traditions were okay too. Not a chance.

V19-20. The answer the apostles gave them was that they were not about to listen to these elders and ignore God. After all, the Lord had warned them to beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees. They had

found an experience in the Holy Spirit and through calvary and the resurrection that was too compelling to even consider any other doctrine.

V21. Peter and John are threatened and released. God was with them and they were doing his will; nothing else was important.

SUMMARY. God was working mightily on behalf of the church and the gospel. It was newly established and would need all the help of God for it to accomplish his will of carrying the gospel to the world. It must start in Jerusalem, a stronghold of religious bigotry, prejudice, tradition and hate. A great miracle, which no one could deny, was wrought. The apostles had the opportunity to preach the message of a risen Lord. As a result they suffered severe persecution at the hands of the religious leaders. But God was with them and they knew it! Their mission had just begun and no man could stop it.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the main argument the priests, etc., had with the apostles?
2. What is implied by the accusation that they were “unlearned and ignorant” men?
3. Why were they unable to find any fault with Peter and John?
4. The man who was healed was above forty years old. How did this contribute to the dilemma of the priests?