

Scripture:
Acts 4:1-21

“What is right in God’s eyes.”

Serving God must be more important than our reputation --- and any concern we may have as to how we will be perceived by others.

Doing what is right in God’s eyes must be the driving force ---- and litmus test ---- through which everything we say --- think --- and do must pass.

Jesus has died.

Jesus has resurrected.

Jesus has ascended.

And it’s only a few short months ago that Jesus walked and talked with His disciples ----- and now here today in our reading from the book of Acts we have Peter and John seized and arrested for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

And only after all of the who’s who of Jerusalem have gathered.

The rulers --- the elders ---- the teachers of the law ---- the high priest -- and so on ---- as verses 5 and 6 recount ----- only after all of the VIP’s and big wigs have gathered ----- John and Peter are asked --- “By what power or what name did you do this.”

“By what power or what name did you do this?” --- verse 7.

Notice it’s not ----- “What have you done --- or why did you do what you have done?”

And instead it’s --- “By what power and in whose name did you do this?”

“In whose name and in by what power did you do this?”

And they're asked this question ---- "In what power and in whose name?" ---
----- and not things like ---- "Why did you do this?" ---- precisely because
what they had done was actually a pretty good thing.

The authorities aren't really upset with what they have done --- healed
someone --- what they really want to know is how they got the power to heal
and in whose name they are healing.

Beginning in verse 8 Peter says -----

"Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for
an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame 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 --- whom you crucified but whom God raised
from the dead --- that this man stands before you healed.

Jesus is ---- "the stone you builders rejected --- which has become the
cornerstone."

Salvation is found in no one else ---- for there is no other name under heaven
given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Talk about nailing it on the head.

Peter doesn't beat around the bush --- he answers their question directly ---
clearly ----- and without any hesitation.

The truth is ---- there are times when power --- authority ----- and motivation
---- matter more than actions and outcomes.

And this is one of those times.

Authority --- motivation ----- the power in which the healing has taken place
----- matter more to the authorities than the actual act itself.

By whose authority they ask --- and --- by Jesus' authority --- Peter
responds.

Basically when asked how are you able to do what you did --- by what
power and in whose authority --- Peter replies saying ---- "You know the one
you killed ---- the one God then raised from the dead ----- yeah Him --- Jesus
----- the rejected one who has now become the most important one ---- well

He's the one who gave us this power --- and it is in His name that we are teaching and healing.”

“The stone you builders rejected ---- has become the cornerstone.” --- he says.

Something noteworthy has already happened in Jerusalem --- a healing ----- that's why the authorities arrested Peter and John in the first place.

But now something even more noteworthy is unfolding.

Now the authorities are facing an even bigger reality --- a movement is beginning to form around Jesus.

The authorities are faced with the truth that there is a new movement in and around Jerusalem --- a new reality has been unleashed into the world.

Far from dealing with ----- and putting an end to this rogue teacher Jesus of Nazareth by killing Him ----- the authorities are faced with the truth that He cannot be killed off ---- and that with Him came a whole new way of being that has not ended with His crucifixion.

The theory of --- if you want to kill a snake you have to cut off its head.

The theory of ---- if you want to end a movement you have to kill its leader has not panned out here.

The new reality that Peter and John represent to the authorities is extremely troubling and threatening to them.

Somehow they recognize that there is a whole new shift of power and authority taking place ---- and they don't like it.

They don't even bother asking Peter and John about how what they have done happened --- instead they skip right to --- “By what power and in whose name did you do this?”

The resurrection has destroyed their old and comfortable --- their under control ----- in human hands ---- way of doing and understanding things.

The God Jesus witness to is in control ---- and not the God of their understanding.

Jesus walking the earth ---- or no Jesus walking the earth --- what He spoke of and lived out ----- is the new authority.

The reality of the resurrection has released new possibilities ----- and they don't like it.

And they don't like it because their power and authority is slipping away from them ---- "It's not right" --- they say to Peter and John." ----- "Stop talking about this Jesus." ----- "Give it a rest." ----- they say.

And Peter and John reply this way ----- picking it up at verse 19 from our scripture reading today ---- "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."

In other words --- "Think what you want ---- but as for us ----- were going to continue to do what is right in God's eyes."

What is right in God's eyes is their measuring stick.

What is right in God's eyes is what everything they think and do must pass through.

And of course this is terribly frightening and interruptive for the authorities because it means the power has shifted from their hands into Jesus' hands --- -- into the hands of Jesus' disciples.

The disciples will do as God directs them even when this direction goes against the local Jewish authorities.

What the disciples are saying is that there is a new reality ---- one where God chooses and Jesus dictates ----- and not you ---- and we chose to follow Jesus even when this goes against and comes into conflict with you.

Of all the Old Testament verses --- the one the disciples quote today is the most often quoted.

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” ---- is the most often quoted Old Testament verse in the New Testament.

Not the 10 commandments --- not ---- “What does the Lord require of you --
- to act justly --- to love mercy ---- and to walk humbly with God.”

Not ---- “The Lord is my shepherd” ----- not even “Love your neighbour as yourself “---- from the book of Leviticus.

Instead Psalm 118 verse 22 --- “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” – is the most popular.

So why ----- “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” --
-- ahead of all the others?

Why ---- “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” ---
ahead of ----- the 10 commandments? ----- or “love your neighbour as yourself” --- don’t they encapsulate gospel best?

The answer ----

Because “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” ---
most perfectly explains what God’s ways are all about.

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” -----
explains God’s ways perfectly.

Specifically that God’s ways are often different than what we would do.

God has a penchant for the unlikely and often rejected ones.

And Jesus is a perfect example of this.

Humble carpenter ---- virgin birth --- betrayed and crucified one ----- King
not by earthly perceptions of power and might ----- King as in humble
servant --- the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone.

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” ----- speaks
powerfully and clearly to the reality that what is right in God’s eyes may not
always be recognized by others.

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” --- says that what other reject just may be precisely what God lifts up.

If something is right in God’s eyes --- God will make it happen --- it will come to pass and nothing can stop it.

Just as Jesus could not be stopped.

Just as Peter and John ---- and each and every one of us cannot be stopped --
- if we are acting out God’s great love ---- and grace ---- and rescue plan that
is Jesus Christ.

It’s as if the authorities in the book of Acts today are acting as though they can stop the mighty waves of the ocean by simply standing on the beach and placing their hands in front of them.

They think that if they can head off Jesus’ followers they can stop the power of Christ from continually entering into the world --- but of course that’s not going to happen.

Just as nothing can stop the waves of the ocean from rolling in --- you can’t push them back --- they just keep on coming ---- so nothing can stop the love of Christ from entering into the world.

Verse 13 from the book of Acts today reads this way ---- “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled --- ordinary men ---- they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled --- ordinary men ---- they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

In other words --- the authorities very quickly came to realize that there really wasn’t anything at all special about these men except for one critical thing.

They had been with Jesus.

They had been with Jesus.

They weren't particularly learned or educated ---- they were unschooled --- uneducated ---- simple perhaps even.

They weren't special in any way ---- they didn't hold posts or positions ---- they were ordinary --- average --- blending in with the crowds.

But ----- one thing was different about them ----- they had been with Jesus.

The fact that they had been with Jesus changed everything.

The fact that they had been with Jesus gave them their abilities ---- their power ---- their influence ----- their gifts.

Verse 12 finds Peter and John saying ---- "Salvation is found in no one else -- for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

In other words verse 12 finds Peter and John saying ----- all because of --- only because of --- Jesus.

"We did what we did --- and we will continue to do what we will do ---- all because of Jesus."

"We did what we did --- and we will continue to do what we will do ----- because it is right in God's eyes."

"We did what we did ----- and we will continue to do what we will do ----- --- by the power and authority of Jesus."

"You know --- the one you rejected."

That's how Peter and John respond when asked by what power and in whose name they come.

Peter and John are willing to risk everything for God --- remember Jesus had just been killed a couple of months earlier for saying and doing exactly what they are now saying and doing.

Peter and John are willing to suffer for God --- they have been arrested and detained --- and are now being questioned and reprimanded.

Peter and John are willing to witness boldly to God ----- when asked what they are doing --- by what power and in whose name --- they speak boldly and unapologetically.

They fear not the consequences --- the earthly consequences.

They know that God is no persons debtor --- and they know that nothing done for God is ever wasted ----- lost --- or regretted.

Peter and John care very little about their reputation.

They care very little about how they will be received or perceived by the authorities.

Instead they simply want to remain faithful to God in Christ regardless of the cost --- regardless of how it appears --- regardless of any and everything except how it all looks through God's eyes.

And so it ought to be with us too.

God first --- and everything else a very distant second.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for today is this -----

Serving God must be more important than our reputation and how we will be perceived by others.

Doing what is right in God's eyes must be the driving force and litmus test through which everything we say --- think ---- and do ---- must pass.

HG Wells once said that --- "The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbours sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God."

"The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbours sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God."

Not for Peter and not for John.

And hopefully not for us too.

Peter and John get it --- drown everything else out and listen to God.

And they got it not because they were particularly bright.

They got it not because they held positions of power or esteem or were respected by others.

The got it because they spent time with Jesus.

We live out the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ not because were particularly bright or accomplished.

We live out the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ---- not because we're in some kind of position of power ---- authority --- or influence.

We live out the gospel precisely because of Jesus.

Precisely because we choose to spend a little bit of time with Him.

What is right in God's eyes is always the right thing to do.

What is right in God's eyes may not always appear right through the eyes of others --- so ignore them and follow God.

Spend time with Jesus.

God has a penchant for the rejected ones --- and specializes in glorifying the unlikely ones.

He often lifts up the rejected.

There's a reason ---- "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." ----- is the most often quoted Old Testament verse.

Because what is right in God's eyes --- even when it is rejected by others --- is always what matters most.

We are called to pay attention to the world through the eyes of Christ --- with a Christ inspired heart.

“The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbours --- or the voice of their friends ----- or the voice of so and so ----- sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God.”

May nothing ever sound louder in our ears than the voice of God!

May what is right in God’s eyes ----- always matter most.

Amen.