

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-8 Witness Before the Jewish Leaders

In many places in the world believers are being persecuted for their faith in Christ. Have you ever been persecuted for preaching the gospel? How did it make you feel? How did you respond to the persecution? In the book of Acts, disciples were often persecuted for preaching the gospel. Our story today is the first instance of such persecution, but as we will discover, it was not the last.

Following the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples in Jerusalem became powerful witnesses for Christ. Everywhere they went, they told people about Jesus. And God confirmed their message by working miracles through them. On one occasion, Peter and John healed a crippled man right inside the temple courtyard. Because of their Spirit-empowered witness, the church grew quickly. Each day more and more people became followers of Jesus. And each day the Jewish leaders became more agitated. This new movement was threatening their authority. They wanted it stopped, so they seized Peter and John and put them in jail.

The next day the high priest called a meeting of the Jewish high council, known as the Sanhedrin. He then had Peter and John brought in for questioning. He asked the two apostles, “Who gave you the authority to preach about Jesus and stir up the people?” Peter was once again filled with the Spirit; just he had been on the Day of Pentecost. And once again he spoke with power and courage. “Why are you examining us?” he asked. Then, pointing at the man who had been healed, he said, “Is it because we have healed this crippled man? Isn’t that a good thing?”

Peter then boldly announced, “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.” He is the stone the builders rejected, but now God has made him the capstone. At this point, Peter said something very important about Jesus. In Acts 4:12 he said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (You should memorize this important verse.)

As the Jewish leaders listened to Peter, they were astonished. How could these unschooled, ordinary men speak with such power and eloquence? Then they realized it was because they had been with Jesus. Since they could see the man who had been miraculously healed standing with them, there was nothing they could say. He was over 40 years old and had been crippled from birth.

After Peter had finished speaking, the leaders talked with one another. They asked, “What are we going to do with these men? Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it.” They finally decided to threaten them and let them go. So they called them in and warned them not to speak any more in the name of Jesus.

However, Peter and John were full of the Spirit, so they answered boldly, “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” (Acts 4:13-20). So, after threatening them some more, the Jewish leaders let them go.

Sometimes we are persecuted for witnessing for Christ. At such times we must remain faithful to him and to the mission he has given us. From this story we learn three important lessons about how we are to respond when we are opposed or threatened for preaching the gospel.

The first lesson we learn from this story is that, as Christ’s disciples, *we must be filled with, and remain full of the Holy Spirit*. When Peter was captured and questioned for telling people about Jesus, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit.” You will remember that this was not the first time Peter was filled with the Spirit. He was first filled on the Day of Pentecost. Now, he is *re-filled* with the Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit comes and anoints him, giving him boldness to speak and wisdom to know what to say.

When Jesus was still with his disciples, he had told them, “When you are brought before...rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say” (Luke 12:11-12). Now, the Spirit was keeping that promise. Further, because the two apostles were full of the Spirit, they could not stop speaking about Jesus.

It is the same with us today. If we will be filled with, and remain full of the Holy Spirit, he will empower us and sustain us during times of persecution. We can make sure that we remain full of the Spirit through prayer, openness to God, and repeated infillings of the Spirit.

A second lesson we learn from this story is that *we must always obey God rather than men*. When ordered to stop preaching in Jesus’ name, Peter and John answered, “We will obey God rather than men.” Certainly, we must obey the laws of society. The Bible clearly teaches this. However, as citizens of God’s kingdom, we serve a higher authority. When the laws of society oppose the commandments of God, we must always obey God.

Jesus has commanded us to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). Therefore, when we don’t testify about Jesus, we are disobeying God. It is our responsibility to obey this Great Commission no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

The final lesson we learn from this story is that *we must never stop talking about Jesus*. As disciples of Christ, our number one responsibility is to tell people about him. In our story, Peter and John were arrested because they were talking about Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. When they were asked, “By what power or what name have you healed this crippled man?” they told the Jewish leaders it was by Jesus’ power and authority that the man was healed. They constantly pointed the people to Jesus. This was because they knew that there was “no other name by which people can be saved.” Jesus is the Savior of the world and the one Mediator between God and mankind. There is no salvation apart from him.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us how we should respond when we are opposed or persecuted for obeying Christ's command to preach the gospel.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that we can be effective witnesses for Christ even in the midst of persecution. To do this, however, we must remain full of the Holy Spirit and committed to Christ and his mission. We must never stop telling people about Jesus "for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Let's now **review** some of the important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. When Peter and John were being questioned, what experience with God enabled Peter to boldly proclaim the gospel to the Jewish leaders?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Peter was filled with the Spirit, you are correct.

2. Quote from memory Acts 4:12.

A. [PAUSE] If you said, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved,*" you are correct.

3. When we have to make a choice between obeying the laws of man and the commandment of Christ to preach the gospel, what should we do?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "We must obey God rather than man," you were correct.

4. What three ways must we respond when we are persecuted for preaching the gospel?

A. [PAUSE] If you answered that, (1) we must remain full of the Spirit, (2) we must obey God rather than men, and (3) we must never stop talking about Jesus, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this to this lesson several times until you can clearly quote from memory Acts 4:12 and until you can tell others the three ways we are to respond when we are persecuted for preaching the gospel.