



SENDTHEFIRE.CA

theme: Obeying Authority (Acts 4:1-31)

materials: Bibles, news story

welcome

What do you think about civil disobedience? That is, disobeying an authority, and accepting the consequences, because your conscience demands it? What would be a big enough deal for you to actually disobey authority like that? Do you think it is even right for a Christian to do?

(Remember, the Welcome section is just to get people thinking and sharing their opinions, so there are no right or wrong answers here, just people sharing what they think).

Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.

worship

Where have you seen God this week? Where have you experienced community this week?

Read out **Psalm 2**, and pray for persecuted Christians around the world. You can get info at

www.persecution.net Pray for the authorities in those places that are persecuting Christians as well, and for the authorities in your nation and city.

Ask if there are any personal prayer requests, and spend some time praying for one another.

word

Read **Acts 4:1-31**

What were the two immediate responses to Peter's preaching?

Have you ever witnessed similar results to preaching? Why or why not?

Who were the Sadducees, and why were they so annoyed with Peter's preaching?

What do you think Peter and John expected might happen to them as a result of the trial?

How did they defend themselves at the trial?

Why were the rulers and elders so surprised by their responses?

Do you agree with Peter that Jesus' is the only name by which people can be saved? Why or why not?

Why did they let them go? What warning did they give them?

What do you think of Peter and John's reply when told not to speak about Jesus anymore?

Were they right to disobey this authority? Would you do the same? Why or why not?

When the community prayed after Peter and John were released, what did they declare about God at the start of their prayer (verses 24-28)? Why did they do this?

Why did they quote **Psalm 2**?

What did they pray for? Do you pray for these things as well?

What was the immediate result of their prayers? Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit? (If not, pray together now to be filled with the Holy Spirit).



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witness

Peter and John told the rulers that they could not help but tell of what they had seen and heard about Jesus. What have you seen or heard about Jesus that you cannot help but tell? Who are you going to tell this week?

If you are in Vancouver, join in with one of 614's outreach ministries such as League of Mercy, Night Vision, or Street Combat.

action points

Continue reading through the entire books of Luke and Acts with one other person. If the other person is a fellow believer, read them through in a public place, like a café (not yelling it out or anything, just reading it to one another). Make a regular time to come in and read together, and more likely than not someone will eventually ask you what you are reading and why.

If the other person is not a fellow-believer, perhaps choose a less public place to read, but again set regular times, daily if possible, to get together and read the Gospel. You don't have to read it all at once. Read two to three chapters at a time, and then meet another day to read some more.

Continue devoting yourself to the fellowship of believers by sharing your financial resources with one another. You can do this by blessing people in your cell or larger community who have specific needs, and by giving your tithes / cartridges to the Church / Corps you are going to.

leader's guide

The passage we are looking at here is a continuation of the story that began in Chapter three, when Peter and John met and healed the crippled man at the Temple gates. After the man was fully healed, Peter began preaching to the assembled crowd about Jesus' death and resurrection, and his power to heal and save. Chapter four completes the story, as we see the instant response of the people and the authorities to this healing and message.

Peter's message was broken up by some Sadducees along with some priests and the Temple captain. The Sadducees were a political and social group made up primarily of the wealthy, ruling class. They were collaborating with the Romans politically, and as such did not like the potentially subversive and destabilizing message of Jesus and his followers. They also were not looking for a Messiah, believing that the messianic age had already begun prior to Jesus, and they did not believe in the resurrection from the dead (on this point and others they were opposed by the Pharisees – **Luke 20:27-40**). Thus, the followers of Jesus were seen as agitators and heretics, unschooled people engaged in unauthorized preaching and teaching. Their instant response the commotion of the healing and preaching was to throw Peter and John into jail for the night until they could meet and discuss the situation.

But theirs was not the only response that Luke recorded. Many of those who heard the word that Peter preached believed and became followers of Jesus. These two opposite reactions to the message of Jesus became quite familiar to the young Church as the story of Jesus spread around the known world. Wherever they went they saw people coming to believe in Jesus, and they also faced persecution from the authorities or other social and religious interests.



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The next day at the trial we see Peter and John facing another eerily familiar experience: the high priest Caiaphas, his relative Annas, and the rest of the Sanhedrin (rulers and elders and scribes) sitting in judgment of the message they preached. They had seen this very thing weeks before at the trial of Jesus, and may very well have expected a similar fate. The first question, though, focused on the healing of the man: by what authority had Peter done this? Peter and John's responses throughout the trial did not centre around defending themselves, but rather on glorifying the name of Jesus. The healing of the man could not be denied, and so the apostles focused on demonstrating how it was by the power and name of Jesus that this had happened, and more besides. The rulers were amazed by their bold and profound responses, given that they were common and uneducated men (i.e. not Rabbis nor trained by professional Rabbis). Jesus had prophesied in **Luke 12:11** and **Luke 21:12ff** that the disciples would be brought before the rulers and synagogues to face trial, that the Holy Spirit would give them words to say, and that this would be an opportunity for them to bear witness about Jesus. All of this was being fulfilled, and would continue to be throughout the life of the young Church. The main thing Peter and John were testifying about was the power of the name of Jesus to heal and to save. In fact, they declare that Jesus' name is the only name that has the power to do this, because of his death, resurrection, exaltation by God and authority. This is truly the crux of Christianity; will you put your faith in the saving power of Jesus?

As much as their message may have annoyed them, the rulers and elders could not do anything to them at this stage, because the crippled man stood before them healed, and everyone knew about it. So they issued them an instruction which, if disobeyed, could be grounds for their arrest and punishment later. The instruction was to cease and desist all preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus. This was an instruction Peter and John simply could not obey, and they told the court as much. They had an allegiance to a higher authority than the court, namely God, and they could not disobey his command, nor could they stop talking about what they had seen and heard God do. The Church then and today cannot obey orders to stop witnessing to the risen Lord, even if there are terrible consequences that must be accepted as a result.

The authority of God is declared again after Peter and John are released and they return to their friends to pray. The first words they use in their prayer are "Sovereign God", a title that means "a ruler of unchallengeable power", far more power and authority, therefore, than the Sanhedrin, or any other authority for that matter. They continue on in prayer declaring who the Lord is: he is the God of Creation who made everything; he is the God of revelation, who spoke by the Holy Spirit through David and Scripture; and he is the God of history, who has used even his enemies (Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and Israelites) to accomplish his set purposes. In quoting **Psalms 2** the church hammers home the point that opposition to the will of God, even by nations and kings and those with earthly power, is ultimately futile and fruitless. This is a God in whom the young Church can be confident, a God who is trustworthy and able to deal with their own situation.

After these declarations of faith, the new Christian community goes on to ask God to consider the threats against them, to help them speak with boldness, and to bring about more healings and miracles. They do not ask for their enemies to be consumed in fire, but rather that God would heal and show himself in signs and wonders. The immediate result is a fresh encounter with the Holy Spirit, similar to that experienced at Pentecost, which affirms the presence of God with them and empowers them to continue speaking about Jesus with boldness, in defiance of the instructions given to them. They need this Holy Spirit empowering, as the trials and tests, from outside and inside, have only just begun.