

## **“THE SPIRIT OF UNBELIEF.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**September 9, 2018, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Acts 4:13-22; Mark 8:34-38; I Corinthians 1:26-31**

### **Introduction.**

We are in chapter 4 of the book of Acts which gives us the early history of the beginning of the Christian church. The apostles Peter and John were in the temple in Jerusalem and they healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus. That caused such a big sensation the Jewish religious and political authorities stepped in and arrested them and they are now before the court.

It was a daunting experience worse than what Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh faced in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee this past week.

Peter has given his testimony. This man was healed in the name of Jesus, whom you killed, but whom God has raised from the dead. Salvation is found in no other name under heaven.

Acts 4:13-22.

I have been catching up on over 40 years of family history with my cousin Jeanell and I asked her about her church. Her pastor has a saying, live a life that demands an explanation.

The high and mighty, rich, powerful religious and political leaders of Israel demanded an explanation from the apostles, and when they got it, they got more than they bargained for. We will look at how the uneducated exposed the unbelief of the leaders and were unintimidated by them.

### **Acts 4:13-14, uneducated, they had been with Jesus.**

The rulers could tell from the apostles' manner of dress, their appearance, language and accent and the way they carried themselves they were unschooled. They had no formal theological or rabbinic training.

They were common lay men, regular guys. In other words, these were guys you wouldn't expect much from, and would be regarded with a fair amount of contempt by their superiors.

The rulers are forced to admit that there is more going on here than meets the eye. They are compelled to see the influence of Jesus in their lives.

The only way they could make sense of these unschooled, untrained men coming off as they did was to look to a source outside of them, that they had been with Jesus. They had His spirit, His fire, His passion, His wisdom and authority.

Remember Peter was a working man, a laborer, a fisherman, and he was just fresh off his terrible failure of denying Jesus.

You can be uneducated, you can be a common person, you can have no special gifts or talents, you can have less than other people, you can have just the most basic knowledge of the Bible, you can be a sinner who has failed Jesus more than once in your life, you can be all of that and worse, you can even be from a small town and never have gotten out much, and guess what, you can still be used in a mighty way by God.

Is your sin bigger than God, is your failure bigger than God, is your weakness bigger than God? Is your past too much for God to overcome? Are you not good enough to be used by God?

God doesn't call the equipped and talented, God equips those He calls. He gives what is necessary to those who have nothing but are available. God uses what is small, weak, foolish.

Some of you think you are too young or too old, or not smart enough, or not especially gifted. Some of you think too lowly of yourselves, that compared to others, you have nothing to offer, that God can't use you. Don't look down on yourself or others, God uses all kinds, be available, be bold. (John VW)

Moms and dads, SS teachers, nursery workers, don't underestimate your labor, even the smallest task done for the glory of God honors Him and He uses it. The Gospel would not go forward without you. The ministry of this church would fall apart without you.

Humility is a good thing, but not when it leads us to fear or timidity or saying no to some challenge God wants us to take. Remember Moses resisting God and saying he couldn't speak well, send my brother Aaron.

What are you most afraid of? Embarrassing yourself, not being worthy enough, failing? God took this brash, loud, uneducated fisherman and made him head of the first church in history.

What made the difference? *Jesus*, his having been with Jesus.

What makes you a better and stronger and more faithful Christian is a relationship with Jesus, spending time with Jesus. The more clearly you see and hear and know Jesus the more confident and convicted you will be.

If you know and love Jesus, it will show, people will know. When you depend on the Holy Spirit you will do and say things and minister beyond your natural abilities, out of your comfort zone. And others will notice.

My wife can tell when I have been at Woods or Katz, I smell like it when I come home. We absorb the environment we are in. I remember my years of factory work during and after college had a slow effect on my language. We become like who we hang around. Do we have the aroma of Christ? Can people smell Jesus on us? Is He rubbing off on us? Do we want that?

A profession of faith five or fifty years ago won't do it. It comes from an abiding, continuing relationship. I would have to go to the coffee shop every day to keep that fresh coffee aroma alive. So, it is with Jesus. Scripture, prayer, hanging out with godly people.

The world needs those who aren't full of themselves, but full of Jesus and have the scent of heaven and the aroma of Christ and live in a way that our character and conduct invites an explanation.

“It's not great talent that God blesses, but great likeness to Jesus” (Robert McCheyne).

**Acts 4:14-18, unbelief, “What shall we do with these men?”**

“What shall we do with these men? Notice a contrast between the ruler's response and the response of the crowds who heard Peter preach.

**Acts 2:37** When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

**Acts 4:14, 16** Seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ... 16 saying, “What shall we do with these men?”

What a strange question when the obvious answer is so obvious. They should ask the apostles more questions to understand the source of their incredible power and authority. They should repent and believe, they should be asked to be baptized and join this fellowship of believers.

Brothers and sisters, can you tell me how in the world you can put verse 16 and verse 17 together? How do you get from 16 to 17? How do you explain unbelief?

**Acts 4:16-17** That a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and *we cannot deny it. 17 But* in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

“An incredible miracle the likes of which we have never seen as been done before our eyes in the name of Jesus by these remarkably common men. Everyone has noticed and

is talking about it. So, the logical thing for us to do is to threaten them and warn them not to speak in this name again. We have to *nip this in the bud* right now before it spreads.”

They don't say why they are to be silent, they don't say why it is bad or dangerous or false. They don't just deny the truth, they are determined to whip it out.

There are people who deny the claims of Jesus and of the Bible on the grounds that they are being reasonable and rational. They accuse Christians of being anti-intellectual. Yet like these rulers there is nothing more unreasonable and unintelligent than to reject the plain truth when it is standing right in front of them. Unbelief is irrational, it rejects facts, things that have been seen and heard. The book of Acts is recorded, verifiable, eye-witness history.

We aren't talking about philosophies or worldviews or opinions that can be debated till the cows come home. We are talking about stubborn facts that just stand there in front of you.

How can people see the truth and not only not benefit from it but not want anyone else to benefit from it as well? It's like saying, look, someone has discovered a cure for Alzheimer's, let's make sure no one finds out.

They are suppressing the truth out of fear, fear of losing their position or authority or having to face the facts that they have been wrong about this Jesus all along.

To know to the truth and then try to oppress it is the clear sign of a bad conscience. To say it is known to all, and still resist it shows no fear of God and only fear of man. They are shameless and betray a hardness of heart. This is pure, unvarnished self-interest and self-protection.

Have you ever known someone who stubbornly refuses to believe the facts right in front of them? Someone who is in serious or extreme denial?

A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest.

When emotion and reason are fighting inside someone's head, emotions win every time.

If we think we will benefit from wrong doing or wrong thinking, we will continue on that path despite whatever the contrary truth is. How many of us do things that are bad for us, physically or spiritually unhealthy?

I tremble at how scary unbelief is and how powerful a hold it still has in my heart. Pray for the Spirit of God to drive out the spirit of unbelief that is still lodged in all our hearts.

**Acts 4:19-22, unintimidated, “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”**

Notice that Peter and John don't have to ask for time to confer in private or think about it and get back to them. They know each other's mind and heart on the matter, they are both filled with the same Holy Spirit.

Peter puts a question to the highest spiritual authorities of the land that they can't answer. "Sirs, tell us what we should do, should we obey God, or should we obey you?"

This is brilliant. Either way they answer they are pitting themselves against God.

"You tell us not to preach, God tells us to preach. You judge for yourselves what we should do. And while you rulers are deciding that question, just so you know, we already know what we will do. We must speak and cannot avoid speaking the things of God."

Peter will not deny His Lord and Savior again. He will not be silenced again.

Why not just be quiet? Why make waves? Why stir up trouble with the authorities? What are they asked to be silent about? They are told to not speak or teach anything in the name of Jesus or about Jesus. In other words, they are to say nothing of the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? It is the glory of God revealed to all humanity, it is the only way of salvation, there is no one name under heaven by which to be saved from sin and death.

To be silent about the Gospel is to rob God and deny Him His glory and to deny hope and salvation to mankind. To be silent about the Gospel is hatred toward God and toward people.

Woe to those who make such a godless demand, and woe to those who obey it. God commands that His Gospel be proclaimed, preached, taught, shared, testified to. If people are going to die if we are silent, how can we be silent?

If someone's leadership leads us away from obeying God, then it must not be followed. When someone in authority requires us to do what God forbids or forbids us to do what God requires then we must disobey and accept whatever the consequences are.

What intimidates you? What scares you? Who intimidates you? Why?  
What power is held over you that is greater than God?

I think part of what astonished the rulers is they were not used to anyone addressing them in the manner Peter and John did. They intimidated people, people usually were shaking in their sandals, maybe looking down. But not these two. They spoke like they had authority on their side.

Peter and John have no fear because there is nothing the rulers can do that they are afraid of. You can kill us if you want, for us there is no higher privilege than to suffer for Jesus.

Do you have something in your life worth dying for? What in this life is worth dying for?

I wonder if there is nothing in your life worth dying for, then what is there worth living for?

Speak the truth in love without worrying what others think or say, without worrying what the secular culture will say or whether they will agree with you. We are called to witness, not to win.

This lame man is standing before us all. If you reject him and the Jesus who healed him you can go on with your life with ease, you won't be embarrassed or made fun of or called names. You will be popular at school or at work or in the shop or out in the fields.

But they aren't your judges, you won't have to answer to them on the last day.

Don't throw God under the bus. Don't be ashamed of your faith or embarrassed at the Word of God, even if people make you feel silly or foolish for what you believe.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven by which we can be saved, and you will have nothing to fear in this life or the next, no fear of death, no fear of judgment. You will be heirs of salvation.

So, you judge which is better, to obey and follow Jesus, or to obey and follow man.

*Where can you find courage, where can you get boldness?*

Notice the contrast between the cowardice of the council and the boldness of the apostles. If you want to grow in courage and bravery and boldness, spend time with Jesus (vs. 13).

Our next text will be a perfect example of how to do this, prayer.

Vs. 29, Look on their threats and give us greater boldness. God answered.

**Prayer:**

Holy Father, draw us nearer to yourself, fill us fuller with your Holy Spirit, may it be increasingly unmistakable that we have been with Jesus, may the world see Him in us, and may you be glorified in our words and actions.

Father, take away any fear, don't let us shrink back or be silent, give us supernatural boldness and courage and clear confidence as you give us opportunity to stand up for you.