

“RECOGNIZED AS COMPANIONS OF JESUS”

ACTS 4:1-22

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A. Introduction

In verse 13, Peter and John are identified by the Temple authorities as “companions of Jesus” (NRSV); they are recognized as people who had been with Jesus (ὅτι σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν). That should be a goal for us: To be recognized as a companion of Jesus!

The passage we read this morning tells us how to be recognized as companions of Jesus.

But first, let’s step back a moment. In the previous chapter, Peter and John healed a lame beggar at the Temple gates, and Peter addresses the crowd once again with a call for conversion. And now, we turn to chapter 4.

B. Jesus’ Companions Arrested (1-4)

Acts 4:1-4 While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, ² much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. ³ So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.

1. Two reactions

There are two reactions to the healing of the lame man and to Peter’s preaching.

- On the one hand, five thousand more people believe the word and become followers of Jesus.
- On the other, the Temple authorities are greatly disturbed and they arrest Peter and John. The Temple authorities include (a) the priests, who offered the Temple sacrifices and were religious teachers, (b) the captain of the Temple, who lead the Temple security force, and (c) the Sadducees, who were wealthy, aristocratic priests, who did not believe in the resurrection.¹

The tension concerns who has legitimate authority to speak for God: The Temple authorities? Or the Apostles of Jesus? Luke makes it clear that the common people have made their decision—they join the Jesus movement.

The Temple authorities, whose power was located in and dependent on the Temple, opposed the new movement. Thousands are being drawn away to the Jesus movement. Moreover, they’re very annoyed at Peter and John, because they have the audacity to think they could just walk into the Temple and teach about Jesus.

¹ Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8.

What's more, Peter and John are teaching about the very person the Temple authorities executed months earlier (Jesus) and about what the Sadducees expressly deny (the resurrection of anyone, including Jesus).

2. What do we learn about the companions of Jesus?

What do we learn about the companions of Jesus—in this case, Peter and John?

1. They speak the truth about Christ, unafraid of the consequences.
2. They imitate Jesus. Like Jesus, they go to the Temple to speak about God's reign and are arrested.
3. They are brave and courageous. They don't back down. They face the very power brokers (religious authorities) that killed Jesus.

C. Jesus' Companions Interrogated (5-12)

Acts 4:5-12 ⁵ The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled (from συναγωγή) in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹ This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' ¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

1. Sanhedrin

The next day the Sanhedrin met—the rulers, elders, and scribes. It consisted of seventy leaders of Israel, who had great religious and political power.² The Sanhedrin was presided over by the High Priest and members of privileged families and noted Torah scholars.³

The Sanhedrin met in a semi-circle, stood Peter and John in the middle, and asked them about their authority. The Sanhedrin knew, of course, they had power and authority, not Peter and John. They ask them to shame them. Who gave them the right to disrupt Temple life?

In verse 7, they ask by *what power* or by *what name* do you do this. Notice how power and name are synonymous.

2. Filled with the Holy Spirit

Peter already told the crowds that his authority was the name of Jesus (Acts 3:12-16). And now, as he speaks up again, he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

² Num 11:16-24; *m. Sanhedrin* 1.1.6.

³ From 6-15 CE, Annas was the High Priest and later his son-in-law, Caiaphas, from 18-36 CE.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a sense of power and emotion beyond one's ordinary experience.⁴ It is an experience especially connected to testifying about Jesus or what you have experienced of him as you've walked with him (e.g., 1 Jn 1:1-4).

Illustration: I've noticed when I speak about Jesus with a doubting and hostile crowd, I feel pretty vulnerable to ridicule and misunderstanding. This text says when we speak about Jesus, the Spirit empowers us. It's only later, when my knees stop shaking, that I sense I was enabled to speak by something not of my own self.

Luke 21:14-15. ¹⁴ So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; ¹⁵ for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

People want religious experiences today. People will go to worship services and try to rate the service—"I didn't feel the Spirit today ... or I sensed the Spirit was really strong."

But this text tells us if you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, you don't have to light candles, sing chores, hold your breath, or hug a tree. Rather, testify about your experience of Jesus, talk about how you have tried to imitate Christ, explain his significance for your life.

3. No other name

In many ways, a key statement for the whole book of Acts is Peter's statement in Acts 4:12:

¹² There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

With the beginning of Christianity, there was a wave of enthusiasm centered in Christ. That enthusiasm is reflected in the sweeping claim of 4:12—*there is salvation in no other name*—which has a ring of enthusiastic exaggeration.⁵

"The 'healing' (*sozein*) of the lame man (4:9) by the name of Jesus now becomes the basis for the most sweeping and extravagant claim that 'salvation' (the same word) is henceforth not possible by any other name."⁶

Salvation refers to God's action to deliver us from harm or danger and to health, wholeness, and peace. It has physical, spiritual, and social dimensions. It is future, but something we enter now.

Acts 4:12 seems exclusivist, that only Christians can be saved. Can every other religion be wrong? Can't salvation, even partial salvation, be experienced in other religions or by non-Christians?

⁴ The NT compares the "filling with the Holy Spirit" with being drunk (Acts 2:13; Eph 5:18).

⁵ Dunn, *Acts of the Apostles*, writes: "the sweeping claim of 4.12 has the ring of enthusiastic hyperbole" (51).

⁶ Dunn, *Acts of the Apostles*, 53.

I think the answer is “Yes.” Non-Christians can experience varying degrees of deliverance, wholeness, health, and peace. But can they experience ultimate salvation in the sense of eternal life with God? Again, I think the answer is “yes”.

We need to recall that the term “name” and “power” are being used synonymously in this passage. The text is saying that *the power of Christ* saves people (not explicit knowledge of the name Yeshua). That is, anytime salvation is experienced, it has its source in Christ whether one knows it.

Take, for example, vitamin C. For centuries ago, sailors would go out to sea and contract a disease called “scurvy”. Scurvy leads to the formation of liver spots on the skin, spongy gums, and bleeding from all mucous membranes. Then, by accident, the British sailors discovered that if you ate limes, you wouldn’t get scurvy. They didn’t know that it was vitamin that cured scurvy. They were healed by what they didn’t understand. Now we know.

The same is true of Christ. Salvation is universally accessible, even among non-Christians, because Christ is universally accessible.

Other passages corroborate this:

1. **John 1:9.** “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”
2. **Acts 10:34-35.** Before Peter preached the gospel Cornelius, he said, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Thus, Cornelius was saved “believer” before he heard the gospel and then he became a saved “Christian” after hearing the message.
3. **Acts 17:23.** Paul was in Athens and said, “I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

C.S. Lewis wrote: “There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it.”⁷

When we meet non-Christians, what is our responsibility?

- To listen to people to see what light they already possess.
- To look for God’s presence among them—in their religion, culture, experience.
- To share our explicit message of Christ.
- To encourage them to grown in the light they already have (not make them better Buddhist or Hindu or whatever)
- To encourage their direction toward God, which leads to salvation.
- To help them grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (NY: Macmillan, 1960) 176.

D. Jesus' Companions Intimidated (13-22)

Acts 4:13-22 ¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. ¹⁴ When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. ¹⁶ They said, "What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." ¹⁸ So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; ²⁰ for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." ²¹ After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened. ²² For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

1. Companions of Jesus

How did the Temple authorities recognize Peter & John as *companions of Jesus*?

- They saw their courage and bravery—their boldness—to testify about what God was doing through Jesus.
- They saw that they were ordinary people, who were doing amazing things, like healing the lame man.
- They were uneducated—not trained as Torah scholars—but they had the same kind of confidence as someone else who was not a Torah scholar—namely, Jesus.

Peter and John were clearly companions of Jesus. Peter's fearless speech in the presence of the authorities contrasts with his performance at Jesus' trial, where he denied him three times. But now, Peter is a new person. Jesus' promised salvation has been realized in Peter no less than the lame man.

We also can be recognized as companions of Jesus *only if* we are healed by Jesus and then walk with him. That means imitating him, doing what we think he would do in our situation. We can do that only if we study the life of Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to realize Christ in us.

Do we do justice? Do we love kindness? Do we walk humbly with God? Do we keep his commandments? If so, we will be recognized as companions of Jesus.

2. Warn not to speak about Jesus

For the moment, all the Temple authorities can do is warn the apostles not to talk about Jesus. They can see the formerly lame man standing in their midst. So they cannot deny the reality of the healing power. But they are stubborn. So they threaten Peter and John. *When truth is not on your side, use violence and threats of violence.*

The authorities do what other authoritarian leaders do—they try to silence the opposition. They shut them down. They suppress the press, control of the media, ban books, and otherwise control the information.⁸

In subtle forms, we have this today. Don't let people talk about Jesus in public. Get Jesus and everything connected to him out of the public eye ... and let's do it in the name of religion itself. In the name of religious tolerance, Jesus is not tolerated.

3. We cannot keep from speaking

How do the apostles respond to being threatened not to talk about Jesus? They say, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:20).

They are compelled by their own experience. They cannot contradict their own experience. Jesus healed them and others. They cannot deny it.

If you want to live with that kind of courageous Christian conviction, get healed! Get right with God. Repent. Throw out the trash. Walk with Jesus. And if you stray, get back on the path. If you fall, get back up. If you grow weary, pray for strength. Keep going. Have victory. Be healed in the name of Jesus. Then, like Peter and John, you will be recognized as a companion of Jesus.

E. Reflections

We should strive to be known as companions of Jesus. People who have been with Jesus—who have been healed by Jesus and walk with him in life—are readily identified.

They are particularly known for testifying about Jesus, even in the face of opposition.

⁸ We see it in our world today: The prosecution of writers and human rights defenders in Turkey, the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez shutting down opposition television stations, the murder of several reporters in Russia who criticized President Putin.