

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – October 11th 2009

Acts 4:1-22

At pastors' conferences, pastors get together and talk about how their churches are doing. Brother Andrew was introduced at a conference to some well-known charismatic leaders who told him about how the Lord was really blessing their church with healings, and 'were enjoying the favour of all people' Acts 2:46. Brother Andrew replied saying that you cannot be like the Church in Acts unless you are also experiencing persecution. Because as we can see only 26 verses later in chapter 2 that the apostles are being reprimanded by the Sanhedrin for healing a cripple and preaching the resurrection.

The Sanhedrin was made up of priests, scribes, and Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection and so it was inevitable that they would clash with those who were preaching the resurrection. Just as Jesus was persecuted, so His followers will be. And most of it would come from the religious authorities of the day, and the family. Ian's own family were deeply offended when he became a Christian and thought he had joined a cult, but so often the way that the religious authorities persecute those who have a vibrant faith is by branding it as a cult.

We read that large numbers of priests became obedient to the faith, and if this happens life can be breathed into any institution. Conversely institutions can be at the forefront of opposition often because the institution's demands for convention, promotion and power make them hostile to vital faith.

What the Sanhedrin did was to arrest the apostles and order them to keep quiet. Because whoever controls the media, holds power. That's why revolutionaries always take over the radio station first. But what the world doesn't understand is that you cannot control the Word of God. It has a life of its own. (cf. the story of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*)

It's like trying to dam tsunami; the word is now moving and the word is springing up all over the place whether through the apostles or apart from them. It is not always like this – at the end of chapter no one converts at all.

The question put to Peter is not one of scientific debate of whether or not the man is healed (as it would be now), no it is assumed that God can heal; the question is by whose authority? And what we hear is the reason why Christianity will always be an offence. The particular story of Jesus of Nazareth, his crucifixion and resurrection is actually the story that makes sense of every other story in all cultures in all times. This story is the story of a tragedy and reminds us that there is a flaw at the heart of the world. The stone has become the capstone, which holds the arch of our lives together. So that in Jesus we are not seeing an also-ran, or an interesting view of the world, nor an additional religious leader. Here is the master-narrative. Salvation is to be found in no one else. The offence to the Jews is not uniqueness and exclusivity, but it is that within the definition of the one true God is the inclusion of Jesus as the incarnate Lord.

Things are beginning to hot up. The Sanhedrin could not gainsay Peter's boldness, as well as his learning. Not only was he quoting Psalms, but this fisherman, although unschooled, gave evidence of the whole sweep of Israel's salvation history. It is very telling to the Sanhedrin that these men had been with Jesus. In the absence of books, they simply have time to be with Jesus and read His word, so that when faced with threats, and the suppression of the media, they have the courage to obey God rather than men, knowing that they may well be killed.

While it would be nice to think everything is now sweetness and light, in fact all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We have a more subtle foe in the shape of consumerism, which we will overcome if we spend time with Jesus