



## "Comparing the Disciples Before and After the Resurrection"

by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus

Preached on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Text: Acts 3-4**

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IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, OUR CRUCIFIED, RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD, WHO IS NOT DEAD BUT ALIVE, WHO IS NOT IN THE TOMB, BUT IS WITH US HERE, NOW WITH HIS LOVE AND HIS POWER AS HE LIVES AND REIGNS AT THE GLORIOUS RIGHT HAND OF GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN OF GOD...

Last week we heard how God continued to glorify Jesus his Son through great miracles done by Jesus' apostles. A man crippled from birth who was well known to all the temple worshippers was healed by Peter in the name of Jesus. He was holding on to Peter and John in the Temple courts – walking and jumping and praising God. When Peter was asked by others how he did this miracle this is what he replied... Acts 3:16, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."

Did Jesus of Nazareth really rise from the dead? Jesus' disciples are saying that he did. They are telling everyone that they have seen him, touched him, and eaten with him. Now they are in God's Temple and have done a very public, undeniable miracle in Jesus' name. They are claiming no power or goodness of their own – they are only proclaiming that Jesus has risen from the dead.

The people of their day have to consider what they are proclaiming and we need to consider what they are proclaiming.

Let's make a comparison.... When Jesus was arrested, Peter was asked three times if he was a follower of Jesus and three times he denied even knowing Jesus. The rest of the disciples also fled for their lives. After Jesus had been crucified and was buried, this is how the Bible describes the disciples... John 20:19, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews," No heroes in that crowd! Together – hiding - doors locked – afraid of the Jewish leadership.

And they had good reason to be afraid. The man they had followed for the past 2 years had been arrested, tortured, and crucified a few days earlier. Put your self in their position... their lives are threatened, their leader dead, and hope is lost. Maybe if they just lay low for a while their lives might be spared.

But something changes them....Something happens between the day they sit huddled in fear and the day they walk into the Temple healing in the name of the Risen Jesus Christ. Peter and John are literally walking into the lion's den – the very Temple where Jesus' enemies carried on their ministry. Peter is no longer denying Jesus but instead, doing miracles in his name. They are no longer afraid

of being connected with Jesus but actually proclaiming that Jesus is alive. They are no longer quietly, hidden behind locked doors in despair but out in the open – indeed in the most dangerous place they could be – preaching the name of their crucified leader.

We need to ask the question – what happened to change those men? What took them from despair to hope? What took them from fear to courage? What took them from denial to proclamation? What brought them out from hiding and led them right into the enemy's camp?

People will give their lives for a lie if they believe it is true. The fellows that drove the planes into the World Trade Center believed that God would reward them handsomely for their actions. They were willing to give their lives because they genuinely believed that a lie was true.

But people won't give their lives for a lie that they know is a lie. Jesus' disciples are risking their lives – every one of them – because Jesus rose from the dead. They would hardly be risking their lives for a lie they all made up. You don't fear death when your Saviour has conquered it!

Let's see what happens next... Acts 4:1-4, "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand."

This should be Peter and John's worst nightmare! What happened to Jesus is now happening to them. They heal in Jesus' name – they preach that Jesus is the promised Messiah – the Saviour of the World – risen from the dead – and they are arrested and jailed. But look... Acts 4:4, "many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand."

What is truly amazing is what Jesus said before he was crucified in Luke 21:12-13, "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them." You will be arrested and you will still my witnesses says Jesus. Tell them that I've risen – some will listen and some will believe. Jesus gives us the same call – we are his witnesses today – we are to tell others that Jesus is risen – some will listen and some will believe.

Listen to what happened to Peter and John... Acts 4:5-6, "The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family." These were some of the very same men who questioned Jesus and delivered him to Pontius Pilate to be crucified. Now, after a night in the slammer, Peter and John stand before them. In fact do you realize that Peter and John are

standing in the exact place and in the exact circumstance that Jesus himself was standing in when he was judged. But Peter's not denying anyone this time.

The account continues, Acts 4:7-10 "They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: 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." Look at the connection that Peter makes for them... A miraculous public healing in God's Temple done by the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The same Jesus that you crucified, but whom God has raised from the dead.

Then Peter makes two more connections for them...Acts 4:11-12, "He is " ` the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. ' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." The rejected stone – a quote from Psalm 118. Peter is preaching to the preachers – Jesus is that rejected stone mentioned in the Old Testament. The stone rejected by you builders – you authorities - that becomes the foundation of all. So connect Jesus with the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises – he is the promised Messiah – and the Old Testament clearly said he'd be rejected by you. But God loves you and wants you to believe in him and be saved – but Jesus is the only way. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." His death on the cross paid for our sins – there is no other Saviour!

Peter spoke boldly regardless of the consequences ... What about us? Are we ready to speak of Jesus' resurrection from the dead regardless of the consequences? Do you need a change of heart in this regard? Do you need to change? God is calling you to change. Picture yourself telling someone that you believe that Jesus of Nazareth really and truly rose from the dead? Picture yourself praying for someone and looking for an opportunity to share with them that hope that you have within you?

I doubt we'd be thrown in jail, I even doubt that we'd lose any friends. We might be thought of as stupid and uneducated people of blind faith with no minds of our own to question. People might think that we are hypocrites if they notice us sinning after we've witnessed to them.

But what does it matter if we're proclaiming God's truth about his Son? What does it matter what others think if we're being faithful to Jesus our Saviour? If the disciples of Jesus don't seek to tell others that Jesus is risen from the dead, who will?

Allow me to conclude with the prayer of the disciples following this account, Acts 4:29 "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness..."