



## "We Must Obey God Before We Obey Men"

by Pastor Jeffrey Miskus  
Preached on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Text: Acts 4:13-31**

DATE: March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

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 prove that Jesus his Son had risen from the dead. The Apostles of Jesus were willing to die for their testimony. And God was doing very public miracles through them.

Today we read how the Apostles and the church faced a critical decision. It is a decision that we are faced with today in Canada. I will grant that the consequences of that decision are no where near as threatening as the consequences faced by the first apostles. But nevertheless, the decision is the same.

You will recall that last week, Peter and John were arrested, jailed for a night, and then brought before the Jewish leadership. Their crime was that they healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus. When they were questioned about this they answered very honestly and told the leaders that it was by the power of Jesus' name that the man was healed. Now let's listen to the response of the Jewish leaders – the same leaders by the way who asked that Jesus be crucified...

Acts 4:13-14 "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say." We always worry about witnessing because we think that we don't know enough. But this passage shows us that the fact that Peter and John are unschooled and ordinary is being used by God to glorify Jesus. It was not of their own power or authority or great learning of magic arts that this miracle was done. Rather, they realized these men had been with Jesus and the man standing next to them was a cripple that they had seen themselves because they worked at the temple where he used to beg.

Let's see what they do next... Acts 4:15-17 "So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together." "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem

knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." The Jewish leaders went into a private meeting. They are at a loss at what to do with Peter and John. They thought they had fixed their problem when they had Jesus crucified. But now his followers are going around telling everyone that Jesus is risen from the dead, and they are doing miracles in his name.

Brothers and sisters we must look at the blindness of the leaders in this case. Listen to verse 16 ... "they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it." They can't deny that a miracle has been done. Something supernatural has occurred – something that only God can do has happened – and not even they can deny it.

As the religious leaders of the people you'd think that these men would rejoice in a healing of this magnitude. Their God was given credit for it!!! Peter has clearly said, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified his servant Jesus." The God of the Old Testament – the God of Israel has done this miracle – and He has done it in His Temple.

You'd think that the temple leaders would be wanting this on the evening news... telling the Romans, the Greeks, and any one else who wanted to listen what God had done. The problem is that it was done by followers of Jesus of Nazareth. And they just had Jesus handed over to be crucified for being a fraud and an imposter. Their blindness is because of their pride.

Their decision is in verse 17, "But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name." There were now over 5000 men who had become followers of Jesus through the preaching of the apostles. Killing Jesus was supposed to have put an end to things but the church was growing daily. So despite the love that the church was demonstrating to the public... And despite the clear miracles being done, in God's temple in Jesus name... The leadership decides to order the apostles to no longer use Jesus' name.

Let's see what happens... Acts 4:18, "Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." Well aren't you glad that we live in a country where we have freedom of speech and that we'd never have to worry about such a threat? Actually we don't live in that sort of country anymore. I'm going to give you an example to show you that we are under some of the same kind of pressure that the first apostles were under. This example is well documented and you can verify it on your own by doing a little search on your internet.

I'm referring to the Alberta Human Rights Commission's decision concerning Pastor Stephen Boissoin. Rev. Boissoin's preaching and teaching on human sexuality came under question. Boissoin's teaching was could be summarized as "God loves everyone but certain sexual actions are sins in the eyes of God." In other words, God forbids certain behaviours and considers them evil. There are many passages in the New Testament to back up the biblical accuracy Rev. Boissoin's preaching and teaching.

The Alberta Human Rights Commission ruled that Rev. Boissoin's comments and beliefs were out of line. They then issued Rev. Boissoin a "Lifetime ban on preaching sermons on this topic." They also issued a Boissoin a lifetime ban on any private communications about the issue. They also fined Boissoin \$7000. Finally they actually ordered Boissoin to publish a renunciation of his Christian views on the topic in the local news paper.

To his great credit – Rev. Boissoin has not done any of these things.

What do Christians do when they are faced with the government telling us what we can and cannot teach? Well, let's look to what the apostles did in the first century. Let's go back to Peter and John standing before the Jewish Leadership in Jerusalem, being told that they are to no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Acts 4: 19-20, "But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Brothers and sisters we are in the same position more and more in the culture we live in today. But we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. God calls us to love all – and God calls us to preach against sin, and preach about God's redemption in Jesus. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. Our sins – the real evil that we do and think and say. And human beings must be made aware of their sins so they can seek God's forgiveness and grace.

Every genuine believer in Jesus knows the conviction of the Holy Spirit that God has wrought in our hearts regarding sin and grace. We know our helplessness against sin and we know the rescue of God's grace. We know the convicting force of God's Law and the life-giving blessing of God's Gospel.

Our relationship with God – established by his love and forgiveness – moves us so that we cannot help but speak of what we have experienced. Acts 4:21- tells us what happened to the apostles after they made their statement of non-compliance... "After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: " `Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. 'Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

We are not of the world – we live in the world. The Bible clearly predicts that the nations of the earth will take their stand against Jesus and his followers. If they crucified Jesus – they will crucify his followers. And down through the centuries there is no organization more persecuted than the followers of Jesus.

Even today, there is no organization more persecuted in the world than the Christian Church. What do we do? This might surprise you... We love our enemies and pray for those who hate us. We pray to God for our enemies and ask that God forgive them and bring them into his family. And finally, we pray for boldness and courage to speak God’s Word boldly and for God to uphold his Word.