

The First Arrests in Church History

(Acts 4:1-12)

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Introduction

On average, there are 29,000 arrests per day in the United States.

That adds up to 10 million arrests per years.

Interestingly, South Dakota has the highest arrest rate among the 50 states and Massachusetts has the lowest.

South Carolina comes in at #18 in terms of people arrested each year.

Now when it comes to what people are being arrested for, drug related offenses have risen to #1, but property are just slightly behind them.

Arrests have also been on the rise in America since the 1960s.

Today there are more people who have been arrested than hold a college degree.

By 2020, it is estimated that almost half of the male population in America will have been arrested before the age of 23.

Strangely, being arrested was very common in early Christianity.

Tonight, we look at the First Arrests in Church History.

We have seen the First Business Meeting in Church History.

The First and Second Sermons in Church History.

We have see the First Membership Roll in Church History..

But now let's look at what we will call the first arrest in church history as Peter and John are taken into custody..

Now this shouldn't shock us at all.

And in fact, I don't think Peter and John were shocked.

Remember, Jesus had told them that if they persecuted Him, they would persecute them..

And Peter and John were also present when Jesus was arrested and taken into custody in the garden of Gethsemane.

So as we arrive at Acts 4 tonight, the first arrest in church history is somewhat expected..

Now, let's read about this event in Acts 4:1-12..

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming [a]in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the [b]message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. 7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, [c]filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "[d]Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are [e]on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, [f]as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the

people of Israel, that [g]by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—[h]by [i]this name this man stands here before you in good health.

11 [j]He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone.

12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

Now what I want us to see in this passage are 3 principles of biblical preaching and evangelism..

We will begin with principle #1 in verses 1-3..

I. Evangelism is Submissive (1-2)

As we get to chapter 4, the church is days old.

Jesus was crucified and resurrected in April and it is now June.

Jesus has ascended back to heaven a few days earlier and now the disciples are on their own.

Except they are not completely on their own as the Holy Spirit has been sent by Christ as a Helper.

He arrived with the sound of a rushing wind a few days earlier.

For a time, the Spirit enabled believers to speak in foreign languages that they had not previously known.

He then equipped Peter to stand up and preach the first sermon in church history right there in Jerusalem in the midst of a large crowd of unbelieving Jews.

He drew some in that crowd to salvation through the preaching of Peter.

In fact, the Spirit saved 3000 people from that first sermon in church history.

So the Spirit has been at work in the first days of the church, but so have believers..

They have come to Christ at a high price of losing friends and family.

They have given their lives to listen to the apostles teaching, to prayer, to fellowship, and to taking part in the Lord's Supper.

But these early believers are also following Jesus' commands to take the gospel to the world..

In Acts 3, Peter and John go the temple and were enabled to heal a lame man in the name of Christ.

And once the crowd had gathered to take note of that miracle of healing, Peter preached the second sermon in history to the crowd that gathered.

He accused them of rejecting and killing Jesus, but he also promised them forgiveness of sins if they would repent and return to Christ.

Needless to say, the first few days of church history are incredible.

The Spirit is working.

The early believers are obeying and preaching, but all of that good news comes to halt in Acts 4.

As soon as the Spirit gets to work, so does Satan.

As he begins to work through the religious leaders of Israel.

This is nothing new.

These same leaders has just arrested and tried and crucified Jesus less than 2 months ago, so Satan uses them again to go after Jesus' followers..

Look back at verse 1..

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, 2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming [a]in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The “they” of verse 1 is simply Peter and John.

They arrived at the temple for afternoon prayers but have stayed for a while preaching to the crowds who were amazed by the healed lame man..

But such an audience draws the attention of the temple police.

The priests are simply Jewish priests who ran the temple.

They were there to offer sacrifices and various priestly duties for the people so they essentially ran the temple.

But they boring the temple guard with them.

The temple guard was the security force.

If you remember, it was a member of the temple guard that struck Jesus for the first time as he appeared before Annas.

The priests ran the temple but the guards enforced their decisions.

But there is also another group here.

The Sadducees.

1st century Judaism has Sadducees and Pharisees.

They had much in common but they also had many differences, which the main one being their view of the OT.

The Sadducees only recognized the first 5 book of the OT as being from God.

And since those 5 books never speak of resurrection, they rejected the idea of a resurrection after death.

That put them at odds with the Pharisees who believed in a resurrection and the entire OT.

Now the Sadducees were smaller in number but the rulers of Judaism were all Sadducees, which gave them lots of power.

So when Peter and John are preaching a message of resurrection, the priests, the guards, and the certainly the Sadducees approach them..

And notice what it says about them..

Verse 2..

They were greatly disturbed at what Peter and John were doing.

Now, this is odd because teaching was common in temple.

Rabbis were always teaching in the temple.

There were always crowds gathering to listen.

And since this is around the festival of Pentecost, there is likely big crowds and much teaching..

So they aren't disturbing with the teaching, they are disturbed with the content the preaching.

In other words, it isn't "temple-approved" teaching..

It is not in line with what the priests considered acceptable.

And teaching about resurrection certainly wasn't acceptable to the Sadducees..

So they approach Peter and John..

Verse 3..

3 And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

Luke doesn't tell us what this group of leaders says to Peter and John.

Luke doesn't give us much detail of the confrontation.

Luke simply says that the leaders were disturbed, and then they went and arrested Peter and John..

Now notice that is it evening..

Peter and John have been there all afternoon preaching..

And since it is evening, there could be no hearing, so they had to go to jail for the night..

But take note that nowhere does Luke tell us that Peter and John were resistant to being arrested..

We don't see any evidence that they did anything but go willing with their accusers..

In one sense, I am making assumptions here, but this will be the pattern of preaching in the NT.

Believers will stand and preach but when they are confronted by authorities, they will go without a fight.

And this is an important principle of evangelism.

We aren't trouble makers in our evangelism.

Though we have an offensive message...

Though we will always have enemies of the gospel..

Christians are peace makers and peace keepers and we submit to authority even when that means going to jail for preaching the truth..

We preach boldly and we trust the Lord fully, accepting whatever consequences come our way.

I have said before and I repeat now.

Christians who pick fights and oppose authority even in their evangelism are not honoring the Lord.

And I will remind you that Jesus never picked a fight or opposed authority during any aspect of his ministry.

He submitted to government, paid his taxes, and took the consequences.

Christians should be just as submissive in our ministry and evangelism today..

So Peter and John head to jail, but note verse 4..

II. Evangelism is Successful (4)

4 But many of those who had heard the [b]message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

In case you are wondering, evangelism always bears fruit.

At times, the fruit is immediate as it is here.

Luke tells us that 5000 men came to believe in Christ that day in the temple..

That doesn't count the women and children so we could see the greatest one day revival here as upwards of 10000 people believed...

The first sermon in church history led to 3000 converts total, but the second sermon has at least 5000 men and certainly an additional number of women and even children...

The preaching of the gospel is always fruitful.

Even when no one responds, there is fruit in your own life as you simply live in obedience to the commands of the Lord..

Even when no one responds, there is always the possibility of fruit down the road.

Peter and John were faithful to preach and God was faithful to provide a harvest of believing hearts..

The call is to go and make disciples.

The results are in the hands of the Lord.

A 3rd principle of evangelism is found in verses 5 and 6..

III. Evangelism is Strategic (5-7)

As the next morning arrives, Peter and John are led from jail to a gathering of the religious elite in Jerusalem.

Look at verse 6..

5 On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

It just so happens that we know these names well..

Annas is the former high priest of Israel and Caiaphas is the current high priest of Israel..

We also see two other names here..

John and Alexander, who were apparently sons of Annas who were also former high priests..

Along with this group of current and former high priests are other rulers and elders and scribes of Judaism...

Though Luke doesn't use the term, this group of Jewish leaders was called the Sanhedrin.

It was 70 members strong, and the high priest presided over the entire group and broke any voting ties since he was the 71st member..

This group has been together less than 2 months earlier in the early morning to convict Jesus on some made up crimes and now they are together again to do the same to Jesus' disciples..

So they are all gathered in Jerusalem to hear from Peter and John, and they place the accused in the middle of their circle...

Look at verse 7..

7 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?”

No the question at hand is how in the world did Peter and John heal a lame man.

The questions about their preaching will come, but now the concern is what if going on with these men to perform such an incredible miracle..

I just want to make one simple point here..

Peter and John have put themselves in the most strategic setting in the world.

Here they are in the presence of the ruling Jewish elite.

You couldn't pick a better audience for the gospel, and Peter ended up there because they went to temple to preach the gospel to the Jews.

Now some would look at this and say, "They are crazy."

But the bottom line is that they have made it to the most influential audience imaginable.

Common sense would say leave Jerusalem and preach the gospel in some other place.

I mean, these same people killed Jesus, but Peter and John are not concerned for their safety.

They are concerned for their people who will die and face eternal hell without Christ.

We must preach Christ in areas that will have the greatest impact, and Peter and John are certainly in the right place surrounding by Jews who need to hear the gospel in the worst way possible.

A 4th principle of evangelism is found in the first part of verse 8..

IV. Evangelism is Spirit-Dependent (8a)

As the leaders begin their interrogation of Peter and John, Peter steps forward to respond...

Verse 8..

8 Then Peter, [c]filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

Of all the ministries of the Spirit in the life of a believer, His ministry of filling believers with the right words for the right time is truly miraculous.

When I think of Peter, I think of a man who knew how to speak the wrong words at the worst time..

But now that Jesus has sent the Spirit, Peter is able to stand and offer words of truth in the most difficult situations possible..

Often times, evangelism doesn't go according to script.

You can plan what to say but you rarely get to say what you planned.

In those cases, we simply rely upon the Spirit who is at work in us.

In those time, we trust the words of Jesus in Luke 12..

11 When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

Certainly, those words rang in the ears of Peter and John as they stood before the Jewish rulers in Acts 4.

And these words must ring in our ears as well.

WE should pray in our evangelism.

We should plan in our evangelism.

But ultimately, we must the Spirit when we engage in evangelism..

One final principle of evangelism is on verses 8-12..

V. Evangelism is Simple (8b-12)

So Peter is empowered by the Spirit and he begins to speak, but what comes out is nothing complex but something very clear and simple..

Verse 8.

8 Then Peter, [c]filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “[d]Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are [e]on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, [f]as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that [g]by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—[h]by [i]this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 [j]He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

The first issue is to answer the question that Peter was asked.

By what power or name had Peter and John healed the lame man?

Simple.

Verse 10..

Let it be know that this sick man had been made well before their very eyes by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene.

No magic.

No hocus pocus.

They told the man to rise and walk according to the power found in Jesus' name.

That was it.

Simple and straightforward.

Yet, that is not all that Peter says.

He then tells this group of 70+ Jews that they were responsible for rejecting and crucifying Jesus.

Peter also makes it clear that God raised Jesus from the dead.

And then like the good preacher He is, Peter points this group of 70+ Jews to a decision.

If they wanted to be saved, salvation is found in only one name under heaven.

And that name is the name of Jesus Christ.

Let me just say this.

A child can preach that gospel.

When people say that they don't know how to speak the gospel to someone else, I don't believe it is a matter of knowledge.

Instead it is usually a matter of courage.

And I say that because telling someone that they are guilty of sin and pointing to the death and resurrection of Christ as their only hope of rescue isn't complicated at all.

Peter preached a simple gospel.

John preached a simple gospel.

Paul preached a simple gospel.

Jesus preached a simple gospel.

The issue of why we fail to speak the gospel to others is rarely an issue of what to say.

It is usually a matter of being too scared to say it.

Look, if Peter can tell the men who killed Jesus that they killed Jesus and still live to see another day, we can certainly share that same truth with our family and friends and strangers we meet.

The gospel is simple to preach.

Just rely on the Spirit, show people their guilt, and point them to Christ who died and rose again to forgive their sin.

That is the simple truth of the gospel, but it is a truth that saves completely.

Now how will the Jews reacts to Peter's answer?

WE will find out next week..

Let's end with a few thoughts..

Conclusion

#1 - We rarely get to choose where evangelism takes place.

Often times, the chance to share the gospel comes unannounced.

Peter and John were going to temple and a lame man provided an opportunity to share the truth.

Peter and John also went to jail and that also provided an opportunity to share the truth.

Look, always be prepared to share the truth, and always be on the lookout for people to share it with..

But also realize that God sends people to us and even puts in places that need the truth.

#2 - We rarely fail in evangelism by messing up what we say.

The fear of not saying the gospel right is what holds people up in sharing the truth of salvation.

Look, if you can't share what God has done in your life by saving you from sin, I wonder if that reality has actually occurred in your life.

You cannot mess up the gospel.

You don't need to know the Bible from cover to cover.

Simply, tell people how the Lord removed your guilt by sending His Son to die in your place on the cross.

The only way to mess up the gospel is to refuse to speak it.

#3 - We rarely trust the Spirit as we should in evangelism.

I don't think I have ever had an evangelistic encounter go as I had planned in my mind.

There is always a question I didn't anticipate or a comment I didn't see coming.

But I can assure you that the Spirit within me knew what was coming, and when I trusted in Him, I didn't live with regret with what I said.

The key to evangelism is not right script to say or the right situation to plan.

The key to evangelism is studying the Word, living the Word, and trusting the Spirit that inspired the Word.

Evangelism is outward fruit of a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

Live right and when you get the chance to share the gospel, you will speak right and the Spirit will use you rightly to deliver truth to someone who needs it.

Let us pray.