

Acts 4: 1-22 – We cannot help speaking.

(It's on page of the blue church bibles)

Whatever you believe, this is a challenging and inspiring passage. Before we read this passage, let me quickly set the scene. Peter and John - two of Jesus' disciples or followers, who had been very close to Jesus during the three years of his ministry on earth, have just brought healing to a beggar who had been crippled from birth. They went with this man into the temple at Jerusalem – he was walking and jumping and praising God for his healing. Peter and John took the opportunity to talk about Jesus, the risen son of God. More about that later, but let's read Acts 4: 1-22.

Imagine one day you're walking along the pier, minding your own business, enjoying the sunshine, when you hear a commotion, people shouting and screaming. They're shouting 'Help! Someone, help!' You run up to find a crowd of people all looking down from the pier at the sea and getting very upset. They're pointing down and you realise there's a man in the sea, bobbing up and down, flailing his arms. 'Help him please! He can't swim!' You look at the people around you - they're either frozen into inaction, or they are fearful that they themselves won't be able to cope and they will get into difficulties too. That won't help.

Before you know it, you've got up onto the railings and you've jumped in. You're quite close to the man and you try to calm him down, but can't do anything to start with, but eventually you grab hold of him, he starts to relax under your control, and you're able to swim him back to the safety of the shore.

Of course by the time you reach the shore the ambulance crew are there to take over. The crowds surround you and start clapping you on the back, shaking your hand and thanking you profusely. In reply, you say it was nothing. As you are a Christian, you say 'Give God the praise and glory for rescuing this man – God gave me the strength to rescue him.'

You think nothing more of it until next morning there's a knock on your door – it's the police. 'Would you mind accompanying us to the station. There's been a complaint about you. They don't like the way you brought God into the events. You're under arrest.'

It seems a bit harsh – would it happen in this country? Around the world you will hear and read of this kind of thing happening all the time; (extracts from EN). People arrested, imprisoned, beaten, tortured, even killed 1

because they dare to say that Jesus is the risen Son of God, and he alone is able to take away the sins of the world.

This is the situation Peter and John find themselves in. They've just rescued a man from 40 years of being a crippled beggar, now he can walk and begin a new life of work. They've explained to the people how they were able to deliver this healing through the risen Son of God, Jesus. Because of this, they've ended up in jail.

The next day they're brought before the court. A court made up of the same groupings that were responsible for arranging and carrying out Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. These people were wealthy and stood to gain financially from co-operating with the Romans. So Peter and John know that it doesn't look good for them. As Jesus had stood before the court, now his followers do likewise, just as 'troublesome' in their eyes. The activities were the same – Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and he performed great miracles to support his claim; Peter and James were healing people by the power of God, and also proclaimed the message that Jesus was the Son of God. Same activities, same claims, same court – was there the same outcome? We'll come onto that later.

But firstly, let's consider why Peter and John were willing to put themselves in this position. Why do Christians all over the world put themselves in danger willingly? It would be easy to live a quiet life, go along in their own ways, make no demands on anyone else, keep the whole thing quiet, hide it. They don't. They make their faith public. They talk to whoever they can about what they believe.

Peter says here in verse 20, 'we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'. We cannot help speaking about it. If you have a child, you can't help speaking about it – you don't just go home and tell no-one about it, you don't hide the fact, and only talk about it when it's dragged out of you. If you watch Brighton win an excellent game of football, it's such a rarity, you go and tell people about what you have seen. This morning we were talking about some men who dismantled a roof so that they could get their friend to Jesus – if you saw something like that, you'd go away and you'd tell somebody about it.

Peter and John spent 3 years with Jesus. They left their home, work and families to follow him. Daily they saw how he dealt with people, how he had compassion on them, how he healed them.

They heard him talk about his Father God, they heard him talk about the kingdom of heaven, they heard him say he was the one who **alone** could bring forgiveness for their sins. They saw Jesus minister to 1000s of people.

They were there when Jesus was arrested, when he was crucified on the Cross at Calvary. Their world and hopes seemed to come to an end. But it **wasn't** the end, because he rose again from the dead and appeared to them, spoke to them, he ate with them. They saw the victory he gained over death. If **you** had seen these things, if **you** had heard these things, would **you** have sat at home, going about your daily life as if nothing had happened? Eating your fish and chips and watching Eastenders? They were there, they had seen it with their own eyes, heard it with their own ears, something so miraculous and wonderful that they **could not help** speaking about what they had seen and heard.

We read in verse 12 of our passage 'Salvation is found in no-one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' Peter could not help speaking about Jesus because he **is the only way** of salvation. 'Salvation is found in no-one else.' There is no other way to a relationship with God.

We recently came back from a holiday in Worcestershire, and one day we went out and were looking for some rock houses – little houses built into some rocks. They were in a hilly, wooded area, quite inaccessible. We drove the car along the A-roads to this area, then onto a B-road to get closer, but when we got onto the country lanes to get into the area that's when our troubles began. There were now no signposts, just a network of narrow, winding lanes. We just had to hope we were going in the right direction. We came to junctions and we didn't know which way to turn, we didn't know which way we were heading. If we didn't find the one road that went where we wanted to go, we could end up in someone's farmyard, or stuck facing a dirty great big tractor. There was only one road that went the right way, follow the rest and you could be going round for hours and still not get there.

'Salvation is found in no-one else.' Jesus himself said 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.' There is no compromise here in what Jesus says, or in what Peter is saying. There is no other way – black and white – you either accept the truth, or you don't – but there is no other truth. Jesus says 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.'

If you're a smoker and the label on the packet says 'Smoking kills', you can accept that fact and act accordingly, or you can choose not to accept it – that doesn't alter the truth of the fact.

If the advert on telly says 'drinking and driving kills', you can choose to accept the fact and statistics or not. The fact remains – drinking and driving kills.

If you see the sign on the motorway 'Danger, fog' you can choose to accept the warning and slow down, or not to accept it and speed into the fog – it doesn't alter the fact that there **is** fog there.

If you read the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – or at least one of them, you will see that Jesus makes huge claims about himself. He claims to be the Way to heaven, he claims to be the Bread of life, everlasting life, he claims to be the Light of the world, he claims to be the Son of God. As you see him perform miracles, however, these claims are supported – no other religious leader has claimed to be God's son, no other religious leader could die for our sins, no other religious leader could rise from the dead. There is no compromise here.

You see, you can't say that Jesus was just a good teacher – he has good teachings, yes, but to claim he was God would make him a deluded teacher. You can't say he was just a prophet – Isaiah never claimed to be God, Jeremiah never claimed to be God, Elijah never claimed to be God. You have to accept the whole package, you have to accept the truth, or to reject the truth – you can't only accept the parts you like the sound of.

Jesus said 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.'

Peter says 'Salvation is found in no-one else.'

Peter and John can not help speaking about what they have seen and heard. They are willing to be put in prison, willing to be beaten and tortured, willing even to die for their faith in Jesus the Son of God. John finished his days on earth after being put into exile but Peter was crucified for his belief that Jesus is the only one who can bring forgiveness for all we have done, and for our neglecting God in our lives. They were willing to go through this for the message they brought – why? Because it was and is the truth. They were there, they saw it, they heard it, they experienced it – no-one could take that away from them.

What about the court Peter and John were facing? (Read 13 – 17)

They were astonished at them. There was something about these men, they were only ordinary men, yet they had such courage. They noted they had been with Jesus – that had made them different. They couldn't deny that Peter and John had performed a wonderful miracle in healing the crippled man – they couldn't deny that it had happened, everyone in Jerusalem knew it had happened, and were praising God for it. The court had to let them go, with a warning not to talk about Jesus.

Peter and John cannot help speaking about Jesus – he has changed their lives, given them courage, they perform miracles in his power, they bring praise to God through their lives. What about you? Has Jesus changed your life? Do you know his truth? Do you know his power at work in your life? Do people praise God for what you have become, through God's grace?

Where do you stand? If you are a Christian are you willing to face the risks of standing firm and witnessing for Jesus?

If you needed to, would you stand and talk about Jesus, your Lord and Saviour even with the very real risk of persecution, imprisonment even sacrifice your life for the truth? Our brothers and sisters abroad do so every single day of their lives. Does it mean that much to you?

Every year we go on holiday, and we come back and say what a wonderful place – I don't know why people crave about going abroad because there is so much beauty to see in our own country. I recommend every place I've been to.

But Jesus says 'I am the Way' - the way back to God, the way to forgiveness, the way to salvation, the way to heaven. Peter recommends this way – he can't stop speaking about it. Those who have seen something of the truth of Jesus will also recommend this way – there's no place I'd rather be than in heaven. That's where God is, that's where love is, because God is love, that's where true beauty is because that's where the God of creation is. Don't you want to find the way there? There **is** only one way – Jesus. Accept his forgiveness – he died on the cross to take the punishment we all deserve for our sins – he has made it possible for us to get back into a relationship with God. Do you accept this truth? Are you rejoicing in this truth? Are you telling others about it? Are you like Peter and John – unable to stop speaking about Jesus – your Lord and Saviour? What a challenge, what an inspiration!

(Pray)

Oh to see the dawn

I'm not going to pray after this song – what I think we should do, is each of us respond individually to what we have heard and to what we are going to sing. In the quiet, think and pray – where do we stand in relation to Jesus and what he has done?

(Leave last verse and chorus showing, musicians play a verse and chorus through)