

Ambassadors of Christ
The Early Church and the Gospel of the King

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When you look at the message of the gospel that's preached today, and you review what the early church spoke as the gospel, you cannot hardly recognize the one as being similar to the other. In short, the early church preached a gospel that was totally different from the gospel that is being preached today. If you turn on nearly any major television broadcast that is commonly aired out of America and in the world today, and you measure what is being said by the template of what the early church understood, I promise you there is no similarity between the two. I am amazed that men and women do not understand that the gospel that was once preached, was a gospel of power and of authority. The gospel that is being preached today, is one that depends upon the support of the hearers this gospel.

But to pursue this I would like for us to review something of what was said, prophetically, about the gospel and something about what happened in the early church, what did the early church know and what did they preach. And to do this I'd like for us to go to Acts 4. Now in Acts 4 we have the concrete and definitive evidence, in Acts 4, of what the early church knew and understood. To setup for Acts 4, we need to review just the things that had happened previous to Acts 4. In Acts 3, Peter and John had been arrested and were brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council, and they were being tried for their position of preaching in the name of Jesus. Now you have to keep in mind, this is within short weeks of the gospel being preached on the day of Pentecost and within a matter of months now since Jesus had been crucified, raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven.

Peter and John, as Jews, are still going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at 3 o'clock. This is not because they are observing the Jewish religion, but because this is their practice, this is their pattern, this is in fact who they are as Jews. Now they've believed in Jesus, so it's no longer the ceremonial, the veil of the temple has now been torn in two from top to bottom. And even Peter and the others, early into the Christian faith, are now being made to understand the full implications of these things and of course the gospel of the New Testament, particularly the book of Acts will more fully express this particular

change as it evolves. For example, at this point there are no gentiles in the church because they still see themselves as yet to go to the gentiles. And God hasn't raised up Paul yet to bring forth this thing. So it's incrementally, the full gospel is being incrementally brought forth, taking it from where the people are. So that's why Peter and John are going up to the temple at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

As they make their way, this beggar at the gate, a cripple, catches their ear as they walk right by him. He cries out for help, the help he anticipates is a monetary help, "Alms!" he calls. Peter says to him, "We do not have silver or gold but what we do have we will give you." And then here are the words that represent a term of art, "Silver and gold we do not have but what we have we will give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise and walk." These, I promise you, are not magical words, these words are used by Peter and John as a term of art. Meaning, everyone around them understand, at this moment, every person around them understands that this Jesus of Nazareth is highly controversial.

What was the sermon on the day of Pentecost? What was the message on the day of Pentecost? The message on the day of Pentecost was, "Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved by God among you with signs and wonders which He did in the midst of you. He is your King and you have crucified Him but God has raised Him from the dead." They had just earlier convicted the nation of Israel of regicide, the murder of the king. And one of their foundational arguments was that He was the Anointed One because God approved of Him by signs and wonders which He did in the midst of them.

So when they say now, "We'll give you what we have and in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise and walk," it is taken within the context of what is happening imminently, the environmental surrounds of this gospel right here, right now, in Israel, in this moment in history. Because in the name of Jesus of Nazareth means, "You killed Him, we have come to proclaim that He is King and Lord, we've established the proofs of it, we've told you before that David said He would be resurrected from the dead, David said He would ascend and sit at the right hand of God. We've told you these things before but now we're about to prove to you that what we said to you about Him is true, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise and walk'. The same authority He had, we now claim to have because we now claim that we are His ambassadors. He has left, He has gone, He has returned to heaven to fulfill the requirements of scripture, but we are here."

So this is the place at which, Acts 3, things begin to turn immediately from the emphasis of Jesus' kingship, to the practical living out of His kingship by the ambassadorship of those who claim to follow Him. So when they say, "In the name of Jesus, rise and walk," they are wanting to continue on where Jesus left off. Not AS Jesus but under the anointing that Jesus had and that He left them, by which now they may continue. So I submit to you, that the early church, beginning with the apostles, claimed to be the ambassadors of Jesus the Christ.

And the first case, where they make this case, openly and publicly, to the Jews. Now they had been doing signs and wonders all along, these apostles have, but at the hour of prayer, in the temple, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon when they confronted Israel, they are now saying, "We are His ambassadors and we are about to demonstrate to you that our preaching is legitimate because signs and wonders which Jesus did in the midst of you we are now able to do in the name, by the authority, of the same Jesus whom you crucified." The high priest, the very one who gave the order and beguiled the Romans to carry out the executive functions of this order by crucifying Jesus; that same high priest is now suddenly confronted with Jesus and His disciples. In popular vernacular, it was as if to say, "We crucified Him, but He's back."

Now they called in Peter and John and they want an accounting of all of this. And Peter and John look at them and say, "Why are you looking at us so strangely, as if by our own authority we are able to do these things? This Jesus whom you crucified is the Messiah and God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of God." Well the high priest and the others understand that they have a huge problem on their hands. For example, here is some of the language with which Peter and John defend themselves before the Sanhedrin. Verse 8 of Acts 4, "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: 'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account 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 of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone which you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'" "When they perceived the boldness of Peter and John and they perceived that they were uneducated fellows, they concluded, 'these guys have been with Jesus'."

"So they warned them and they threatened them and they said, "Never again should you be found preaching in the name of Jesus." And the implied threat was, "We killed this Jesus," because these are the elders who tried and convicted Jesus and secured His execution by the collaboration with the Romans. They're making a threat, filled with the same menace that attended their threats to Jesus and they in fact carried out their threats against Jesus. So now, these threats are not idle threats, these are menacing threats because of the recent history of their ability to carry out such threats against Jesus; so these are very real. And 'in the name of Jesus' is troublesome in this period, in this epoch of the church.

Now Peter and John are let loose and they return to be among the brothers and they're giving a report to them, that's where I want to pick up. This is in Acts 4 verse 23, "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 (that is, when the people heard

what the chief priests and elders had said to Peter and John, when the believers heard) they (the believers) raised their voices together in prayer and this is what they said, 'Sovereign Lord, you who made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them, You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David," and they quote the second Psalm, "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." This is Psalm 2.

Now they make an application of the second Psalm and they go on to say, and they're praying to God about this, they say, "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate (those would be the kings of the earth) met together with the gentiles and the people of Israel (that would be the nations that are raging against God) to conspire against (quote) Your Holy Servant Jesus whom You anointed."

Unmistakable the application of the second Psalm. The Anointed One is the Lord Jesus the Christ, the King is the Lord Jesus the Christ, the Son; all of these are the designations from the second Psalm. This is the early church, this is the first crop of believers; they are understanding the message that had been spoken to the Jews, which message has to do precisely with Jesus as the King. So here is what they pray, verse 28, "They continued their prayer and they said, 'They (meaning Pontius Pilate, Herod, the Jews and the gentiles) did what Your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now Lord," they continue in their prayer, "consider their threats." Well they had just threatened Peter and John, threatened with doing with them what they had done to Jesus, "consider their threats and enable Your servants to speak Your word with great boldness."

Unlike the church today, which would ask God to change the government, appoint presidents and kings and judges who would be favorable to the church; unlike those, these early believers, contrasted with today's believers, these early believers asked the Lord for this: Consider the threats, not only against the apostles but against us who are the followers of Jesus through the apostles teachings, consider their threats and enable us to speak boldly in the name of Jesus. And they go on to say, "Stretch out Your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Your Holy Servant Jesus." What are they praying? They're saying, "God, we know they're threatening us but we believe that Jesus is the Anointed King. Who are these nations who think that they can triumph over Your Holy Servant Jesus, the One whom You anointed? Who do they think they are that they think they can succeed against Him? We tell You this, O God, put us into the fight because inasmuch as Jesus IS the Anointed King, inasmuch as He IS the Messiah, and we believe that. We are not afraid to be put at risk for His names sake because He is perfectly willing to take care of us, He's perfectly willing to give us what power, what authority is necessary to preach this good news of Jesus as the King."

The early church did not shy away from physical danger or from harm because they believed that Jesus was the King and they believed that they were the legitimate representation of His person in the earth. When they asked God to quote, "Stretch out Your hand and perform signs and wonders through Your Holy servant Jesus," what they were asking for is the right to speak the representation of Jesus as the King and to demonstrate by signs and wonders and miracles, that Jesus in fact was who He claimed He was. They were asking for the privilege of putting themselves at risk for, and in, and because of the name of Jesus. I'm here to tell you, these people believed in the gospel of the King, the early church believed in the gospel of the King and of His kingdom. They didn't think of anything they could do for Jesus, they weren't operating on the assumption that there was some value that they could create to bless Jesus, in return for which He would give them favors. That's the modern gospel, that is another gospel. Paul said if anyone preaches any other gospel than that which you have received, let him be accursed. He said it twice in the book of Galatians, "So this I say again to you, if any men or angels preach any other gospel than that which you received from us, let him be accursed."

The church today has put itself under the curse of another gospel. Jesus responded to Pilate when Pilate said to Him, "Do You not know that I have the authority to set You free or to condemn You?" Jesus looked at him and He said, "You do not have any authority over Me unless God gave it to you." This is how confident He was of being the One anointed by the Father and sent into the world, this is how sure He was that He was the appointed and the designated heir. So in His day, He stood up to the authorities. Whether they were the Jewish authorities who were trying Him on a charge of treason, or whether it was the Roman authority looking for a way to set Him free. The funny thing is, in the trial of Jesus, He would not let Pilate set Him free; Pilate was looking for a way to set Him free but Jesus would say to him, "You don't have any authority over Me, not unless God gave it to you." Jesus isn't trying to get free, He understands that He's here to fulfill a destiny for which He was born. And He refused to be paroled or pardoned by the hand of man. Once it was clear to Him that the Father had commended Him over to death, from that point on Jesus would set His face toward the cross. Because for Him, life and death was a matter of living to fulfill the purposes of God.

Jesus was not afraid to die. Jesus' great turmoil, His great internal pressure and obsession, was not with dying on the cross; the thing He feared, the ONLY thing He ever feared, was the consequence of drinking the cup. What was in the cup? The cup was all of the sins of all mankind, the cross would be the place where He would take this on. But the cup, being made sin, He who had no sin, that was the only thing that thoroughly depressed Jesus to the point where there were great drops of sweat like blood. He wasn't sweating the cross, when He was dying on the cross He was handling the affairs of life; giving His mother to the custody of John, forgiving the thief on the cross, talking to one of the two thieves on the cross. That wasn't what terrified Him, He was terrified in the

moment when God forsook Him, because He was made sin who had no sin. And then He would cry with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

It was being separated from God, it wasn't dying that so moved Jesus, it was being separated from God. He endured all of that, that He might do the will of God. And then God raised Him from the dead just as David had prophesied that God would do. And then God caused Him to ascend to the right hand of God, just as God had caused David to prophesy, centuries, indeed a full millennium before this event occurred on the earth.

So this gospel that was preached on the day of Pentecost, answered the question that surrounded the execution of Jesus: Was He the King? The Jews said He was not and sought to put Him away on the grounds that He had spoken blasphemy. But when the early disciples preached, they preached, "No, He is the King." And then they began to heal and do miracles, other miracles, in the name of this crucified, risen and ascended Lord. And the early church, reviewing the record of what happened to Jesus; Peter and John concluded that they wanted, on pain of their own lives, they wanted also the right to represent Him in the earth. So they embraced the gospel of the King. Now with the gospel of the King came the right to represent the King in the earth. With the King having ascended, seated on the right hand of God where He will remain until the appointed time, where the heavens will give Him up and He'll come again to the earth. The King has designated His servants to do His will, to do what He would be doing until He returns.

On one occasion, and this is recorded in the book of Luke, some people came to Jesus to tell Him that Herod was threatening to kill Him and His response was to say, "Go tell that fox I will cast out demons today and tomorrow and on the third day I will reach My goal." It's the 13th chapter of the book of Luke. Verse 31, "At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to Him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else, Herod wants to kill You." Now Jesus understood that Herod was just an agent of Satan, so Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox." Now in the context of a fox, if you lived in a farm yard and there was a fox running around, what would you be concerned about? The chickens. So Jesus says, "Go tell Satan (go tell that fox) I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow." A thousand years with God is as a day. He's saying, "Go tell Satan I will drive out demons and heal people and preach My gospel for two thousand years and on the third day I will reach My goal." And then He goes on to say, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent unto you, how often I long to gather your children as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings but you would not." "Go tell that fox, he'll destroy Israel but he will not destroy My church. At the end of My two thousand years I will come again." Why? "Because I am the King, I will do what I want through those I send and they will be empowered by Me."

The gospel was always the gospel of Jesus the King, the early church believed it from the

inception. Today you are called to believe and walk in the same thing. So we'll explore the gospel of the kingdom in subsequent messages.

I'm Sam Soleyn, God bless you. I'll see you again next time. Visit me on the website, www.soleyn.com. Until next time, bye bye.