

20260823 The Stone, the Presence, the Name – Ps Bijoy

Acts 4:1-22

Peter and John are arrested before the sun sets on their first sermon. The healing at the temple gate has drawn a crowd, and the crowd has drawn the attention of the priests, the temple captain, and the Sadducees. Verse two tells us exactly what provoked them. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees denied resurrection as a doctrine. Now two uneducated fishermen were not simply disagreeing with them. They were producing evidence. A man who had been lame for over forty years was standing in the temple courts on healed legs, and he was pointing to the name of Jesus. The authorities could not silence the miracle, so they tried to silence the men.

This is the first thing the text shows us about bold witness. It provokes established power precisely when it threatens to be true. Peter and John are not arrested for being disruptive. They are arrested for being convincing.

Now Peter and John stand before the same court that condemned Jesus seven weeks earlier. The charge is a healed man. The question the council asks is not whether a miracle happened. They cannot ask that; the man is standing beside his healers, unable to be argued with. Their only question is where the power came from. "By what power or by what name did you do this?" That question drives the whole encounter, and Peter's answer gives us three things worth staying inside for a while: a stone, a presence, and a name.

1. The Stone They Rejected

Peter's answer in verse 11 is a single line from Psalm 118: "This is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." This is not a simple quotation. Psalm 118 is a Hallel psalm, sung at Passover, the very psalm the crowds were singing when Jesus rode into Jerusalem days before His death "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Peter takes a psalm the nation sang in celebration and turns it into an indictment. You builders, he says, using the psalm's own word for the nation's leaders and teachers, the ones responsible for the structure of Israel's faith, you are the

very builders the psalm describes. You inspected this stone. You tested it against your plans for what the house of God should look like. And you threw it out.

The psalm does not say the stone was flawed. It says the builders rejected it, and God built with it anyway. That is the whole point of verse 11. The council's verdict on Jesus, delivered with total confidence in their own right to judge, was reversed by God without asking their permission. Their rejection did not derail the plan of God. It was absorbed into the plan and became its foundation. The council is not inventing a new kind of unbelief in that room. They are repeating an old one, and Peter is not accusing them of something new. He is showing them where they stand in a very old story.

The question for us is not whether we would have voted with the Sanhedrin. It is whether we still test Jesus by our own blueprints, deciding in advance what a saviour, a leader, or an answer to prayer ought to look like, and discarding what does not fit the plan. The builders were not fools. They were experts. Expertise did not save them from rejecting the cornerstone; it gave them the confidence to do it.

2. The Presence They Could Not Deny

Verse 13 records the council's reaction to Peter and John, and it is worth reading slowly. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished." Two Greek words sit behind "uneducated, common men." And one word is worth looking at, *agrammatoi*, literally means without letters, not illiterate in the modern sense, but without the formal rabbinic training that would have licensed someone to interpret Scripture publicly. The second word meant a private citizen, someone outside the trained, credentialed class. Together the phrase is a technical dismissal. These men have no education. Therefore, no standing to speak in this room.

And yet they spoke with *parrhesia* - the word translated "boldness." It is built from *pas*, meaning all, and *rhexis*, speech. All-speech. The freedom to say everything, withholding nothing, unedited by fear of the listener. The Greeks used it for a citizen's right to speak plainly in the public assembly. Luke uses it for men who by social rank had no such right at all. Fishermen do not address the Sanhedrin as equals. Fishermen did not have that

right. And yet here is Peter, standing before the very court that once frightened him into denying Christ three times, speaking without flinching.

The council cannot explain this with the categories they have. Training does not explain it, Peter has none. Natural courage does not explain it either. This is the same man whose nerve failed him in front of a servant girl by a fire a few weeks earlier. So, Luke gives us the only conclusion the council could reach: "they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Not that they once met Him. That they had been with Him, long enough, closely enough, that something in them had visibly changed shape.

This is the quiet centre of the passage. Boldness is not something we build through preparation, and it does not belong only to confident personalities. It is what stays behind after real time with Christ, and it is visible enough that hostile men looking for a reason to dismiss two commoners could not find one. All they could say was, this does not belong to men like this. It belongs to men who have been somewhere.

3. The Name That Saves

Peter closes with one sentence: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." One word carries this whole verse - *sōzō*. It is the ordinary Greek word for save, and it is wide enough to cover more than we usually let it. It is the word used when a sick person is made well, when a drowning man is pulled from water, when a person is rescued from final judgment. One word, three verses earlier, describing the lame man's legs. The same word here, describing what every soul in that council chamber still needed.

That is the whole force of Peter's claim. He is not switching subjects from a healed body to a saved soul. He is using the same word on purpose, because in his mind they are not two different rescues. The healing at the gate was one small, visible case of the very thing Peter is now offering the council-deliverance, wholeness, rescue from what threatens to destroy us. And Peter narrows it as far as it can be narrowed. Not one name among several. Not the best of many options. No other name. Under heaven, among men, there is exactly one door, and Peter has just named it to the men who nailed that name to a cross.

This is the sharpest claim in the whole encounter, and it is the one the church is most tempted to soften. Not because we disbelieve it, but because exclusivity feels impolite in a room full of people who have their own doors. Peter does not manage that discomfort. He states the claim and lets the council decide what to do with it. Salvation was never a matter of finding a name that works for you. It is a matter of there being exactly one name that works at all.

Conclusion

Three things stood in that council chamber, and three things stand before us now.

A stone the builders rejected, which God made the foundation anyway. A presence that could not be explained by training, only by nearness to Christ. And a name, not one option among many, but the only one under which rescue is found.

The Sanhedrin asked Peter and John by what power, by what name. It is worth asking ourselves the same question. Not what they relied on, but what we rely on. If our confidence rests on our own credentials, we will have exactly as much boldness as our credentials can give us, and no more. If our hope rests on a version of Jesus shaped to fit what we already expected, we will reject the stone the moment it does not match our interests.

The council could not deny the healed man standing in front of them. They could not argue away the stone. They could not explain what they saw in two ordinary men. And they had no second name to offer.

Neither do we, on our own. We are asked to have been with Him, long enough that it shows. To build on the stone that were given by the Father. And to speak the one name Jesus- that saves, plainly, without shrinking it to make it easier to hear.

Build your life there. Nowhere else holds.