

God is Sovereign in Jesus' Mission

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- [0 : 00] Let me give you a little lesson in power. So in engineering terms, power is measured in kilowatts or volts or horsepower.
- But what if today we decided to measure power in units of Trump? So Donald Trump, most powerful man in the world. Let's say we're going to measure power in units of Trump.
- So the US government, let's say that's one Trump. So there's one of him, one Trump. But Xi Jinping, I practice saying that, Xi Jinping of China. Let's say he's 0.9 of a Trump.
- He's almost equivalent, I would say. Our leader, Scott Morrison, what do you think? 0.1 of a Trump, I would say. I think we're only a small island.
- In our passage, we meet the full Sanhedrin. That is the Jewish ruling council. There were 71 members, all led by the high priest. They dictated life in Israel.
- [0 : 56] They held their keys to God and his temple. They are easily, easily two units of Trump. And they are about to give the apostles a lesson in power too.
- You see, in chapter 1, verse 8, Jesus promised that his witness will go from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the very ends of the earth. But already the mission is in danger of not making that first Jerusalem hurdle.
- Because for the first time in Acts, Jesus' mission faces powerful opposition. So this week, powerful opposition from outside the Sanhedrin.
- Next week, powerful opposition from within, as Satan himself attacks. But for us here in Australia, we are thousands of miles away from that sort of religious violence.
- And we're thousands of years ahead of Acts chapter 4. Or are we? You see, I think there is a powerful form of secularism at work in Australia that seeks to remove Jesus from the public square.
- [2 : 05] Not violently like other countries, but still powerfully enough so that we shrink back from publicly sharing our faith or speaking about him.
- And if you think I'm overreacting, how do you think the local government meeting, the university faculty, the workplace HR, or even the family barbecue would go if you said you agreed with verse 12 over the page?
- Everyone turn over and have a look at verse 12. Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. This might be one of the biggest claims in Christianity.
- It's very exclusive. Notice the two negatives. Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name. It's a universal claim that all other ways of salvation are wrong.
- So Islam and its five pillars, the Hindus trying to improve their karma, the atheists who only believe in the physical universe. They're all wrong.
- [3 : 12] Just try agreeing with verse 12 out there and see what the powers that be do to you. See how they treat you.
- And this sense of opposition, it scares me enough to never speak up. Maybe I'll say that Jesus is a way of salvation, but not the only way.

What are weak Christians, what are we supposed to do when opposed by power? Well, Acts chapter 4 is a lesson in power.

So that scared and embarrassed Christians will be bold in a society like ours. So please keep your handouts with you and please turn back to the beginning of chapter 4.

This is point one. Seven weeks earlier, the Jewish authorities, they gave Jesus their best shot. They arrested him. They tried him and then they crucified him.

[4 : 11] It's a very powerful move. Last week, Daniel said, usually killing someone ends them, which I think is he was understating, obviously, in his own way. But it's a very powerful move, what they did to Jesus.

And so in verse 2, they're greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. What's more, last week, the apostles perform a Jesus-only miracle.

They healed that lame man. You see, the Sanhedrin's worst fears are being realized. Jesus is back. His mission is continuing. And they were sad, you see.

Sad, you see. Sad, you see. I'm a dad joke. It's a dad joke. You're allowed to do that, right? But the Sanhedrin, they have the power. So in verse 3, they seize Peter and John.

They throw them in jail. It is Jesus' trial all over again. In verse 5, the rulers, the elders, the teachers of the law, they're all there. In verse 6, Annas the high priest was there.

[5 : 17] So was Caiaphas, others of his family. It's the full Sanhedrin. They are the Jewish senate and Jewish priesthood. They are church and state, all rolled into one.

Very powerful. They're in Jerusalem. The temple is not far away. They've got the home ground advantage. It is two units of Trump up against what verse 13 calls two unschooled and ordinary men.

They killed off Jesus seven weeks earlier. Peter and James are about to get a lesson in power as well. So let's see what happens. Verse 7. Verse 7.

The Sanhedrin had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them. You see, in our passage, powerful people witness a display of real power.

And they're scared that their position and status will be taken away. And so they ask in verse 7, by what power or what name did you do this? In other words, whose authority or who are you acting for when you healed the lame man?

[6 : 24] The passage, it keeps mentioning Jesus' name over and over again. It's there in verse 10. The name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It's in verse 12. Verse 17.

It's in verse 18. The name of Jesus. It's in verse 30 as well. Through the name of your holy servant Jesus. What is it about Jesus' name that suddenly ends a conversation?

That invites the hostility? See, it's easier to say, I go to church. Or I believe in God. But to mention Jesus' name, everything gets suddenly weird.

And I think the answer is that he is the issue. Opposition centers on Jesus and the claims that he makes.

You see, powerful authorities versus weak Christians seems like an easy victory. But that is until verse 8 turns the tables.

[7 : 27] Verse 8. Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit. This is point number 2. So verse 8. Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them, rulers and elders of the people.

If we're being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this. You and all the people of Israel. See, just as Jesus' spirit makes a lame man walk, so too he empowers the apostles to speak boldly.

Verse 10. It is by the name of Jesus, Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

The word there is saved. Peter is saying, you and God think very differently about Jesus. You crucified him, but God raised him from the dead.

Last week it was, you crucified him, but God glorified him. He says in verse 11, Jesus is the stone you builders rejected. Of course, the eagle-eyed amongst you will know that that is Psalm 118, but he changes it ever so slightly.

[8 : 41] I wonder if you can spot how he changes it. So to help you, Barry, please, on the screen. So on the top, that is Psalm 118 from the Old Testament. And the bottom is how Peter himself quotes it.

Can you see the difference? You spot it? Barry, can you flick to the next slide? And then go back again, backwards and forwards. And see it? You.

Thanks, Barry. See, Peter narrows his eyes at the Sanhedrin. Jesus is the stone you. You builders rejected.

Thanks, Barry. You see, Psalm 118 is an illustration about God's building the temple. That's where you could meet him, where forgiveness of sins was possible, where membership of his people was counted.

The Sanhedrin, they were entrusted to ensure the temple was solid and secure, to keep building it up. But when they came across Jesus, they said, nah. He doesn't match our scaffolding and our plans and designs.

[9 : 44] And so they rejected and crucified him. Just as Psalm 118 predicted. But they forgot the other part of the prophecy.

The stone you build is rejected. Here it is. Has become the cornerstone. You see, back then when you would build a building, you had to get the right cornerstone to start.

A cornerstone's very size and shape would determine what the building would be. The Sanhedrin wanted to build God's temple on their own power and their own religious sort of superiority.

The picture in verse 11 is that God has brushed off and brought back to life the Jesus stone. The very one the Sanhedrins rejected.

In other words, God is building a totally new temple, a totally new future. And Jesus is now the place where we meet God, where forgiveness of sins, membership of his people, and of course eternal life is possible.

[10 : 49] On Jesus, God builds his future. Which is why, verse 12, salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

You see, the true measurement of power isn't sort of units of Trump. It is units of salvation. Is your stone that you're building a life on, is it able to save you?

Verse 12 says, there is no other name. And actually it says, by which we must be saved. You see, people don't need a bit more church or a few more good morals.

They must be saved. And they might argue, well sure, yeah, the lame man, he must be saved. And I must be saved from financial ruin.

And I must have good health. But must be saved by Jesus. And they're scratching their heads. And I think that is our fault, probably. See, we Christians are pretty quiet about God's judgment.

[11 : 53] The fact that all people will face his opinion on their lives. That's something we have pretty much kept to ourselves. But the Bible is very clear about it.

So Barry, please, on the next slide. This is later on in Acts. I think the language is pretty clear. He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he's appointed.

He's given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. Thanks, Barry. In our own creeds, which we say almost every week. Here we said it just a few seconds before I got up. We say, from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Verse 12 says we must be saved. If you are not a Christian here, please take this very seriously. You must be saved by Jesus.

Otherwise, you are not saved. In the coming months, in the lead up to Christmas, Andrew and I are going to be running a few workshops to help you to share your faith better with your loved ones so that they will be saved.

[12 : 59] In two weeks' time, on the 20th of October, straight after this meeting, we're going to have a short prayer meeting, maybe 15 minutes, 20 minutes long, specifically to pray for your loved ones to be saved.

We did it once before, and the very next day we had successful results from a family. 20th of October, look out for that as it comes towards us.

For the Sanhedrin in our passage, the obvious thing for them to do is admit they got Jesus wrong. Repent, turn to God, ask for forgiveness. That is what 5,000 people in Jerusalem had done so far.

But instead, the only must they did was verse 17. We must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.

You see, their opposition, it isn't a problem of evidence or understanding or truth. Verse 14 says, they could see the man who had been healed standing.

[13 : 59] Verse 16 says, we cannot deny the sign that has been done. It must be a lack of humility. They're too powerful to humble themselves before Jesus' name.

And so God uses two unschooled and ordinary men to give them a real lesson in power. In verse 14 to 20, in those verses, the Sanhedrin slowly become weaker and weaker.

So at the end of verse 14, there was nothing they could say. They're too embarrassed to speak in front of Peter and James. So in verse 15, they order them to withdraw so they can confer together in private.

Verse 16, what are we to do with these men? Verse 19, Peter and John replied, which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or listen to him. You be the judges.

Which I think is, Peter is mocking the fact that this whole council of judges, verse 21, cannot decide how to punish them. In verse 18, they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

[15 : 09] And Peter basically says, no, no. Verse 20, as for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. Here is the whole Sanhedrin, the power of the day.

Two units of Trump, we said. But Jesus' spirit empowers two ordinary men to make these authorities look weak and impotent again and again and again.

And the reason why is they have rejected the cornerstone and they have forgotten point number three. So I'll be briefer about point three, which is verse 23 and 31.

These verses are essentially a prayer. Peter and John, they're released back to their friends and they all pray together. And the main aspect of their prayer is, as Annette was leading us this morning, that God is in control, that he's sovereign.

Have a look at verse 24. Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. See, that is who they are praying to, the sovereign creator.

[16 : 17] This verse reminds timid Christians that any opposition we face is something he has made or has sovereign control over. In verse 25, Peter prays about Psalm 2.

That was our Old Testament reading. Verse 25, why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

You see, Psalm 2, it predicts how the authorities will treat God's king when he arrives. And in verse 27, that's exactly what happens. Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with others, it says they conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you've anointed.

That is what they did to him. But verse 28 shows something remarkable. It says, They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

See, not only did God predict their opposition, but he is able to turn it around for his own purposes. That is power, a real power, I think.

[17 : 27] The Sanhedrin, they may just be two units of Trump, but how many more units is God? Infinite, I guess. This prayer, it's a model for timid and embarrassed Christians like us.

It reminds us that God is in control, that even when opposition comes, he is sovereign enough to turn the tables on them and use it for his own purposes. In Psalm 2, there's a really great line, a great verse.

It says, Jesus laughs at the authorities that oppose him. It says he scoffs at them. I want you to imagine that in 50 years' time, that our worst fears are realised, and that it becomes illegal to speak about Jesus, both in here and out there.

Our children and our grandchildren, they will need to be reminded that God's king laughs at powerful authorities, that to him, they're just like this little Lego plastic man.

You stupid Christians, stop talking about Jesus. Funny to us. Funny to Jesus as well. He scoffs at them. They might look scary, but to Jesus, they just look like a little angry plastic man.

[18 : 47] The apostles, they know this, which is why in verse 29, they don't pray for opposition to end, but instead, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

God answers their prayer, verse 31, 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.

Notice as the buildings start to shake, the Christians become more unshaken. It doesn't mean they are trouble free. In a few chapters, the first Christian martyrdom will happen, as they kill Stephen.

For us, we might lose some friendships, or a promotion, or even a family member or two, along the way. But will we be bold enough to open our mouths and share our faith?

Maybe all of Melbourne won't bow the knee to Jesus. Maybe 5,000 people won't be added to our church numbers the way it was back in Acts, but it won't be because Australian authorities were too powerful for Jesus, or that he was less sovereign in some suburbs, or that he was sleeping on the job.

[20 : 06] Actually, it'll probably be because Christians were too scared and embarrassed to open their mouths and speak. And so when the opposition or the social awkwardness comes, the first thing to do is ask yourself, do you believe verse 12?

Will you believe it for your loved ones? And secondly, will you pray? I realise that some of you might find it harder to get out and about and share your faith with others, so prayer is the application for you.

Clearly, we are all weak and we're all embarrassed. The opposition looks powerful and scary. But will we trust that God is sovereignly powerful, that he's in control, that he's able to turn their opposition against them, as we see in Acts chapter 4.

He loves to answer prayers like verse 29. So this week, when you get up, think of all the people in your life who don't know Jesus and say verse 12 for them.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to the Henderson family and given to your family, by which they must be saved.

[21 : 32] And then say the simple prayer verse 29. Sovereign Lord, enable your servants, enable me to speak your word with great boldness and give it a go.

Let's pray now. Sovereign Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we are empowered and bold and courageous and loving enough to speak up even in a city of powerful opposition.

Enable us, your servants, to speak your word with great boldness so that our people would call on Jesus' name and be saved. And we ask this in his name.

Amen.