"One thing leads to another"!

We’re in a great study of the Book of Acts and we saw last time how the apostles Peter and John were entering the temple but there was a lame man by the Gate Beautiful, who they healed. And what we are going to look at today stands as a warning to everyone who wants to confess to being a follower of Christ. Or as the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:12 “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

A young couple was on their way to get married when they had a tragic accident. The next thing they knew, they were standing arm-in-arm at the pearly gates. They told Peter what had happened and then said, "We really want to spend eternity as man and wife. Is there anyone here who can marry us before we go in?" Peter thought for a minute and said, "This is an unusual request, but if you'll take a seat, I'll see what I can work out."

The couple waited for three months before Peter finally came back with a minister to perform the ceremony. The man said to Peter, "We've had some time to think about this. We know that marriage is difficult even under the limited term of 'till death us do part.' Since there is no death in heaven, I just want to make sure that if this marriage doesn't work out, can we get a divorce?" Peter said, "Are you kidding? It took me three months just to find a preacher. What do you think your chances are of finding a lawyer?"

And I guess the point of the story is that there will be some people we expect to see in heaven when we get there, Peter being one of them. Acts 4:1-3 "The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day."

You see while Peter and John were still preaching, a bunch of men fully armed came into the temple area and arrested Peter and John. Now who were these men? Well Luke tells us there were priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees. Now we know who the priests were, they were descendants of the tribe of Levi and they were assigned by God to serve God in the temple.

The Sadducees were proud, secular materialists who denied the existence of a spiritual world, holding that neither angels nor demons existed, denying any such thing as the resurrection, and rejecting the Old Testament scriptures, except for the parts of them which had political usefulness, and also refusing the traditions of the elders.

And over a period of time, through wealth and political power, they had gained control of the religious apparatus which ran the temple, the office of the high priest being regularly filled from this group.

But who was the captain of the temple guard? Well he belonged to one of the chief-priestly families of the Levites and in the temple he ranked next to the high priest. In other words he was the main man with authority in and around the temple area.

You see loved as the sermon title says, one thing does lead to another. Luke tells us the apostles were arrested because they taught the people and preached the resurrection by preaching about Jesus.

Now let me ask you, where are the Pharisees at this time? Well we can’t be certain where they were at this point but perhaps they were absent because the apostles were teaching the resurrection.
“One thing leads to another”!

You see the Pharisees were the teachers of the law and they believed in the resurrection where as the Sadducees didn’t. And what we will see as we go through the Book of Acts is that the Pharisees seem to be sympathetic towards the church and some of them even obeyed the gospel.

We see it Acts 5 where a Pharisee named Gamaliel says to those in the Sanhedrin in verses 38-40. “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God. His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”

We see it again in Acts 15:5 “Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The apostle Paul being a great debater argues his defense with the Pharisees and Sadducees in Acts 23:6-9 and says, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.) There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

A three-year-old boy put his shoes on by himself. His mother noticed that the left shoe was on the right foot. She said, "Son, your shoes are on the wrong feet." He looked up at her with a raised brow and said, "Don't kid me, Mom. They're the only feet I've got" "

You see loved ones, we only have one pair of feet and there is only one faith and it's the one faith we find within the Bible. When you go back to the scriptures as your defense, you will leave other religious people arguing among themselves.

We get into arguments or discussions with people about what they believe and sometimes we end up arguing about what we believe. The way to end these discussions is simply by going back to the scriptures. Tell them what the Bible says, and if they read it for themselves and find they have a problem with what the scriptures teach then they need to take it up with God Himself. In other words let the Bible speak for itself.

Now Luke tells us that it was now evening and Peter and John apparently having preached for nearly three hours find themselves in jail until the next day. Now I just want to raise an important point here.

**Remember when Jesus was on trial, what time of day was it?** In Matthew 26:47ff tells us that it would have been around midnight when Jesus was arrested, and He was hurried to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where in expectation of the capture, a company of chief priests, scribes and elders members of the Sanhedrin were already assembled.

Now the trial of Jesus was illegal because they were supposed to wait until the next day for trial. But I guess if you have a hidden agenda and you don’t want to be reminded to do things right, you will always find a way around it. You see the apostles had to wait until the next day to stand trial which was the right procedure.
“One thing leads to another”!

Now the point I’m trying to make here is simple. You cannot and must not chop and change scripture to suit your own personal agendas. The religious leaders had one rule for Jesus and another rule for the apostles, which is a practice that mustn’t be allowed to govern the Lord’s church.

Let me give you a couple of examples. If a person hasn’t been to church for many months, you cannot write a letter to them telling them they are dis-fellowshipped, when there are other members of the same congregation who haven’t been seen in church for many months.

You cannot rebuke a person for gossiping when you know there are others who are gossiping. You can’t have one set of rules for a certain group of Christians and another set of rules for another group of Christians. The church as a whole needs to be consistent and that consistency is found within the bases of Scripture.

1 Timothy 5:21 “I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism”.

Now as I have already said, the apostles healed the lame man then preached the resurrection of Christ, then they were arrested. You see one thing really does lead to another. Because despite their arrest, God caused the preaching of the gospel to bring forth fruit, as Luke reports the number of men who believed came to about 5,000.

Acts 4:4 “But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”

There’s a famous saying which says, ‘every dog has its day’. Well for Peter and John their day was about to begin. Acts 4:5-7 “The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Now I don’t know if you have ever been to court but it is a very intimidating place, with a judge, defense and prosecution layers, witnesses. But if your crime is a serious one you would have to attend a high court, which is an even more intimidating place, with a judge, defense and prosecution layers, armed police, witnesses and the jury.

You see when Peter and John were brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin. This was not a normal court room, this was the high court consisting of 70 members, plus the high priest, that oversaw matters concerned with the temple and its worship. It was, in fact, the chief political force among the Jews.

Now the reason I tried to explain who was in attendance is because the incident in the temple where they healed the lame man was taken very seriously. And notice this also, they never questioned whether or not the miracle took place. They were more concerned about under whose authority it was performed.

And I wonder if at this point Peter remembers the Lord’s words in Mathew 10 where Jesus said in verses 17-20, "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”
“One thing leads to another”!

Luke tells us that, that very thing happened next. Acts 4:8-11 “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today 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 Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "`the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'"

Have you ever had a conversation with someone which seems to go on and on? And maybe thirty minutes later you’re still waiting for them to get to the point?

Well Peter wasn’t like that, Peter was an in your face preacher who just got straight to the point. You see Peter filled with God’s Spirit tells them it was through Jesus, the very person they had rejected and crucified. It was through Jesus’ Name that the man was made well, and Peter wanted the council and all of Israel to know that profound truth.

In fact to reinforce that truth upon these leaders he quotes from Psalm 118:22. He wanted to show the Sanhedrin, that they as the religious builders, had rejected the very stone which was chosen by God to be the head of the corner.

When these leaders were questioning Jesus about His authority, He said to them in Matthew 21:42 "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "`The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Peter when he’s trying to encourage some Christians to grow up says in 1 Peter 2:4-6 “As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

There was Christian man who had heart surgery a number of years ago and he received letters and gifts from all across the country. And he said that no other gifts affected him so than the one he revived on December 31st.

It came with a Bible, and inside the Bible there was a message and it said, "Dear Thomas, I am so glad to hear that every thing went well with your surgery, I want you to know that God was watching over you every minute and even though I know you questioned that, I also know that one day it will be revealed to you and my prayer is that you remain open and God will touch your life as he has mine."

"Once I was a disbeliever, when I could not fill my life with sports, I would simply substitute sex, liquid drugs or material things to feed my internal shell like appearance, I was never satisfied." "But I finally realised after 4 years that Jesus Christ was in me, He will reveal his truth to you Thomas because he lives."

And you see loved ones that’s what Peter’s point was when he said in Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Hell is not afraid of my name, hell is not afraid of your name but all of hell is terribly afraid of Jesus Name. Because it’s only in Jesus Name can a person receive spiritual healing, or salvation. You see that’s a truth that everyone on this planet has to accept or deny. And its only in speaking the truth in love will you silence your worst enemies.
“One thing leads to another”!

Acts 4:13-15 “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together”.

Now here are a couple of apostles, not trained or well schooled by any rabbis or scribes, except the greatest teacher of all who was Jesus. Yet they dared to interpret scripture with great boldness. And because of that boldness in their interpretation of Scripture the council noted they had been with Jesus.

And notice also that you cannot deny the facts. The council could not deny the miracle because the formerly lame man stood before them healed! And so in a state of panic they order the apostles outside while they conferred. What are they going to do? Are they going to kill the healed man and deny the whole thing?

No they couldn’t kill him and deny the miracle because reports of the healing were wide spread. Acts 4:16 "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it."

You see they couldn’t disprove Peter’s arguments for the resurrection of Jesus, but they needed to stop the preaching of Jesus before more of the people turned to follow him. So Luke tells us they ended up doing the only thing they could do, threaten them.

Acts 4:17+18 “But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

And loved ones here a big lesson for the church today. We must not and cannot compromise the truth of the Scriptures for anything or anyone. I read the book ‘Historical survey of the churches of Christ in the British Isles’ written by brother Joe Nesbit and Frank Worgan and others. I strongly suggest that if you get the chance to read that book then go for it. Because within its pages you read about the amazing struggles for unity over the New Testament church and every time you think the saints of old have settled into New Testament practices and doctrine something happens. They want to be like the nations around them, they compromise with the denominational practices.

You see loved ones, when we speak in Jesus Name; we’re speaking with the authority of Christ Himself. And when people tell us to stop preaching from God’s word because they find it offensive, the church needs to stand up and say what those apostles said in Acts 4:19+20, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Talk about a kangaroo court left speechless. Have you ever had an argument with someone who always just has to have the last word? You know I remember I used to argue with Funmi a lot before we became Christians and as she was walking out of the room she would always have to say something to get the last word in. Usually it was threat of getting up and leaving me which unfortunately she did one time.

But these religious leaders ended up doing that very thing, Luke tells us Acts 4:21+22 “After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.”
"One thing leads to another"!

Just like these religious leaders did in Jesus’ day, they continued to do with the apostles. When Jesus was around they were always looking for an excuse to take Him and find some fault with Him.

On one of these occasions Jesus was sharing with the people the parable of the vineyard owner, the religious leaders knew He was talking about them but they couldn’t do anything because they were afraid of the people. Mark 12:12 “Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.”

You see Peter and John made it clear to them that the Sanhedrin had no authority to revoke a command from God. They told them that they felt compelled, by the power of the things they had witnessed, to proclaim to everyone the good news concerning Jesus the Christ.

And so because the miracle was such common knowledge and had caused so many people to glorify God, the council had no other alternative but to let the apostles go without any further punishment.

They simply added a few more threats and let them go rather than risk the people taking the apostles’ side. After all, here was a man who had been lame forty years but was now walking.

Now if that were you and I we would probably be glad we got out of there with our lives. And I suspect that we may even just chill for a while until things settle down a bit around us. But not with Peter and John, instead of lying low waiting for the issue to settle, they kept the momentum going.

Acts 4:23 “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.”

Now you and I would probably being saying “wow, you were lucky to get out alive or you’re lucky you didn’t get a prison sentence”. But loved ones as I have already said, one thing really does lead onto another.

The entire group lifted up their voices in praise to the Almighty Creator. Acts 4:24-28 “When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God."Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'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.' Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen."

They just praised God for His providential working in the death of Jesus. Instead of going into hiding, they recognised that God was with them and no one and no thing was going to stop them doing what God wanted them to do.

Now let me ask you what’s the first thing you do when God delivers you from a trial or situation? Do you come away feeling lucky and hope that you don’t have to face that trial again or do you come away thanking God for being with you through that trial? Do you thank Him and ask Him to give you the strength and courage to get through the next one?
You see not only did the apostles praise God for what happened, they go on to ask God to help them do what He wants them to do. Acts 4:29+30 “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

They asked God to give them all the strength to preach the truth in spite of the threats of the Sanhedrin. They wanted everyone to know that all authority belongs to Jesus Christ and no one else. Matthew 28:18 Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” He didn’t say some authority but “All authority” and loved ones all means all.

And when you recognize and submit to His authority, you will be given what you need most of all in that moment. You will be given the strength and courage to go on. Acts 4:31 “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.”

Every time in the Book of Acts when God’s people are persecuted or put on trial, you will always see them coming through those times even bolder than they first went in.

And the question I want to leave you with this morning is this, when persecution comes what is it going to lead you to? Is it going to lead to you compromising with the world to avoid criticism? It is going to leave you without any fight left in you? Or is it going to leave you thanking God for His presence and just ask that He make you a stronger and more courageous Christian because you want to please Him and not men?

If after reading this you want to know more about persecution for being a Christian or if this sermon has raised other questions in your thoughts then please just contact me and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

God bless and thanks for taking the time to grow in your understanding of God’s Word.