

Settled Convictions

|Acts 4:1-22

Continuing our journey through the Acts of the Apostles narrative and *What Matters in the Church*, to Acts 4, and consider *Settled Convictions*.

Acts 4:1) While they were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees confronted them, 2) because they were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3) So they seized them and took them into custody until the next day since it was already evening. 4) But many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. 5) The next day, their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem 6) with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family. 7) After they had Peter and John stand before them, they began to question them: “By what power or in what name have you done this?” 8) Then Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders: 9) If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, 10) let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead – by him this man is standing here before you healthy. 11) This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12) There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.” 13) When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14) And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15) After they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among themselves, 16) saying, “What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign has been done through them, clear to everyone living in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17) But so that this does not spread any further among the people, let’s threaten them against speaking to anyone in this name again” 18) So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19) Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; 20) for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” 21) After threatening them further, they released them. They found no way to punish them because the people were all giving glory to God over what had been done. 22) For this sign of healing had been performed on a man over forty years old.

Last week we concluded that 21st century American Christianity has experienced the loss of home field advantage. We’ve lost our home field advantage because our influence has diminished, and our influence has diminished because we’ve lost our convictions. Most any dictionary will define conviction as a *strong persuasion or belief*, but conviction is more than belief. *Conviction* is also a legal term, defining the action taken, usually by a jury, when the certainty of a crime has been established beyond reasonable doubt. **A conviction is a strong persuasion beyond reasonable doubt.** Knowing what to do, why to do it, and how to do it is worthless without the right conviction to keep doing it. In every generation, the people who have made the greatest impact upon community culture, for good or evil, have not been necessarily the smartest, wealthiest, or best educated people: they have been the people with the strongest convictions. We must settle three convictions beyond any reasonable doubt in order for the church to regain home field advantage.

1. Settled Conviction #1 = No one gets to heaven without an encounter with Jesus. The Acts 4 narrative is a continuation of the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar in Acts 3. Peter seized the supernatural moment to preach with boldness his second sermon, inviting and invoking the astonished crowd to repent and believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah whose death and

resurrection secured the forgiveness of sin. Suddenly, the favor with all the people of Acts 2:47 and the evangelistic harvest of more than 3000 saved following Peter's first sermon forged a threat to the religious and political power of Jerusalem. The priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees interrupted Peter's sermon and arrested him and John for disturbing the peace and preaching what they considered false doctrine. But the interruption of Peter's sermons could not impede the evangelistic harvest, as Luke the narrator affirmed in verse 4 the addition of 5000 more converts. The next morning, the full religious council convened and posed this demanding question to Peter and John, *By what power or in what name have you done this?* Peter responded boldly – *If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a disabled man, by what means he was healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead – by him this man is standing here before you healthy. This Jesus is the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.*" Peter was convinced beyond reasonable doubt that **Jesus is the cornerstone, the supreme name, and the way to be saved.**

Convictions matter, and this conviction ought to matter the most. This conviction must be settled by every deacon and every church leader, in every Bible Study class and Discipleship group, and by every member of First Baptist Lafayette. We live in a nation and a region of common belief that religion will get you to heaven, that church membership is equal to salvation, and that a well-rounded life is more important than a sold-out commitment to Christ. It's high time – it's past time – to speak clearly and believe convincingly, beyond reasonable doubt, that **Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship with Jesus Messiah.**

We live in a culture of relative truth – that is, truth is what works for you. We need more than ever to settle beyond reasonable doubt that no one is saved without an encounter with Jesus, no matter how good they are, no matter how religious they are, no matter how family-oriented they are, no matter how socially-accepted they are, no matter how together they've got it, no matter their financial status, no matter what church they are member of.

2. Settled Conviction #2 = No One has an encounter with Jesus without the boldness of ordinary people. Acts 4:13 is an amazing statement: When their accusers observed the *boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and knew that they had been with Jesus.*" These religious professionals were perplexed and confused, because the miraculous healing of the crippled beggar and the uproar of spiritual conversion had been instigated by uneducated and untrained men. *Uneducated* is a Greek word meaning *unschooled*. Compared to these priests, temple captains, and Sadducees, Peter and John were basically unschooled, uneducated men. *Untrained* is the Greek word for *ordinary*, and became a descriptor for a *layperson* or *nonprofessional*. [Acts, The New American Commentary, p. 145]

The church exists for the purpose of evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship and ministry. **God's strategic plan for accomplishing all of the purposes of His church involves equipping and gifting ordinary people.** In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul clearly stated the church's ministry strategy: God gifts His church with pastors and vocational leaders whose function is to equip unschooled and ordinary people to do the work of the ministry. I fear that in the 21st century American church, we've created **The Curse of Ministry Professionalism = employing educated professionals to fulfill all the functions of the church.** For over 135 years, the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention have looked to their seminaries for the training and education of their ministers. All six of our seminaries, including my place of employment and calling, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, were established and funded by Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program, for the purpose of training and equipping pastors, church staff, missionaries, and chaplains in ministry skills and theological training. I believe in education and training. However, **If First Baptist Lafayette is to regain home field advantage, we must reestablish the function of "every believer is a minister."** You will never be able to hire enough

professionally trained ministers to do what this church needs to do. If the lost and unchurched of Lafayette and Acadiana are to have an encounter with Jesus, YOU must get involved in their lives, YOU must be witnesses, YOU must do the work of the church. And if God is going to use any of us, people have to see and know that we have been with Jesus!

3. Settled Conviction #3 = No One is beyond the Reach of God's Hand.

After threatening Peter and John and warning them to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus, the accusers sent them on their way, but not before Peter and John responded: *"Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."* Peter and John were convinced that **God specializes in changed lives**. They were first-person eyewitnesses to all of Jesus' miracles, including this healing of the crippled man – *they were unable to stop speaking about what they had seen and heard*. People who knew this crippled beggar viewed him beyond the reach of a miracle because of his age. But Peter and John were convinced beyond reasonable doubt that no one is beyond the reach of God's Hand. No doubt they believed **Isaiah 59:1** – **"Indeed, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear."**

From this point forward in the Acts narrative, numerous case studies will reveal that no one is beyond the reach of God's Hand. In Acts 8, Philip would be reminded that no one is beyond the reach of God's Hand when the Ethiopian eunuch had an encounter with Jesus. In Acts 9, Ananias of Damascus would be reminded that no one is beyond the reach of God's Hand when he observed the changed life of Saul of Tarsus. This same Peter would be reminded in Acts 10 that no one is beyond the reach of God's Hand when he witnessed the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius.

Convictions matter, because people matter to God. E. Stanley Jones told about a missionary who got lost in the jungle. After wandering around for hours, he finally stumbled upon a small village and asked one of the natives if he could lead him out of the jungle. The native acknowledged that he in fact did know a way out of the jungle. "All right," said the missionary, "Show me the way." The native led the missionary to the edge of the clearing, and with a machete, began to hack his way into the jungle, with the missionary following behind. After about a hundred yards of hacking into the jungle, the missionary cried, "Stop! Are you sure this is the way? I've not yet seen a path or a trail that would lead us out of the jungle." The native stopped and responded, "Sir, in this jungle there is no path – I am your path."
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Have we become so arrogant, so prosperous, so inward, so Americanized, so cold and calloused, that we have forgotten that Jesus is our only hope if we are to regain home field advantage. The future effectiveness of the church depends on the settled convictions that no one gets to heaven without an encounter with Jesus, that no one has an encounter with Jesus without the boldness of ordinary people, and that no one is beyond the reach of God's hand. Have you settled these three convictions in your own heart and mind?