

An Eye-Witness Challenges The Authorities

Introduction:

Eye-witnesses often have a vivid and authoritative story to tell. One of the television stations used to call their news hour *eye-witness news*. Their stories relied upon the TV camera crew and journalist actually being on the spot when a crime or historic event took place or else they managed to find someone who had seen the incident unfold.

The Apostle Peter was such an eye-witness. He had been with the Lord Jesus for his entire ministry and had seen and heard all that Jesus said and did. His two Letters in the New Testament along with his five speeches in the Book of Acts have a ring of truth about them. It is believed by many that Mark, who wrote the Gospel of Mark, depended on Peter for much of his account of Jesus. Peter is an influential and reliable witness of the events surrounding the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

In the early days following Jesus' resurrection, amazing things happened. We read in Acts 5:12-14 that *the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. As a result, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.* The Jewish authorities were not happy! As Luke records in Acts 5:17: *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy.* Peter and the others were arrested and imprisoned on several occasions but they were miraculously released and continued teaching the people about Jesus, despite being strictly forbidden from doing so.

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In our reading from Acts 5 today, we find Peter and the other Apostles before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Parliament, being reminded that they had been told not to teach in the name of Jesus again. *You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.* And of course they were guilty!

It must have been incredibly intimidating to stand before the Sanhedrin. Maybe it was time for a little compromise or at least a softly, softly answer to the High Priest's accusation. But not for Peter! Boldly and defiantly, Peter speaking on behalf of the Apostles gave their answer to this charge. He made six points in his brief speech:

We must obey God rather than men. While the Sanhedrin had authority over the Jewish people, God's authority was greater and this was the authority to which the Apostles would submit. Peter continued....

The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead. Peter wanted the Jewish leaders to be clear that it was their God whom they claimed to serve who had raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus was central to all of Peter's speeches. Peter then pointed the finger at his accusers:

Whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. Peter laid the blame for Jesus' death at the feet of the Jewish leaders. We know how they agitated for the death penalty to be given when the Roman Governor wanted to release Jesus.

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God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. God did more than raise Jesus. He placed him at his right hand, the place of honour, as Prince and Saviour. God's purpose in sending His Son to die was so that His people might repent, might turn from their sins and be forgiven. This was first to the Jews then to the Gentiles.

We are witnesses of these things. The Apostles had personally witnessed everything they spoke about. Their testimony about Jesus was reliable.

And so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him. Not only were the Apostles eye-witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection, but they claimed that the Holy Spirit is also such a witness for those who repent, believe and obey. This was the fulfillment of Jesus' words to the Apostles in John 15:26-27 which says: *When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.*

On their release from prison on a previous occasion for speaking about Jesus, the believers prayed for great boldness. (Acts 4:29-31) The Lord certainly answered their prayer when Peter spoke on this occasion to the Sanhedrin.

The very next verses in Acts 5 from verse 33 indicates how resistant the Sanhedrin was to God's message from Peter: *When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.*

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Conclusion:

Now we need such boldness to be witnesses for Christ. We live in an increasingly secular and anti-Christian society. We are called upon to be tolerant of every view, but the view of Christians is increasingly not tolerated. May our God give us boldness and courage to open our mouths to speak of our risen Saviour.