

Used by God - Acts 4:1-13

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Team Evaluation

To: Jesus of Nazareth

From: Jordan Management Consultants

Dear Sir:

The twelve men you've picked for management positions in your new organization have now completed our battery of tests and personal interviews. Their responses have been processed by our innovative analysis techniques to yield a highly accurate picture of their suitability in your enterprise.

The profiles of each individual are included. You will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service, we provide a few general comments from our knowledgeable staff for your consideration. We believe our extensive experience analyzing personnel qualifies us to make certain observations that may benefit our clients. These recommendations come *without* any additional fee.

It is our collective opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They lack an appropriate team-consciousness. We forecast regular and on-going interpersonal conflicts among them. We recommend you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

In particular . . .

~~S~~imon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to verbal outbursts.

~~A~~ndrew has no qualities of leadership.

~~T~~he two brothers *James* and *John* place personal interest above company loyalty.

~~T~~homas demonstrates a challenge to authority by constant questioning. This will severely undermine overall morale.

~~O~~ur background investigation reveals *Matthew* has been *blacklisted* by the *Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau* for his collaborations with foreigners.

~~J~~ames bar *Alphaeus* holds radical political views certain to bring him into conflict with other Team members and could potentially lead to future legal inquiries.

~~T~~haddaeus scored dangerously high on the manic-depressive scale.

Only one of your current candidates showed solid potential. He is a man of outstanding ability and resourcefulness, has a keen business mind, and possesses contacts in high places which can further your enterprises interests. He is highly

motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend *Judas Iscariot* as your controller and chief assistant.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely, *Jordan Management Consultants*

B. What It Takes to be Used by God

1. The disciples *were* a pretty motley group before Jesus called.
2. They never would have come together as a team on their own; they were far too diverse.
 - a. The 4 fishermen shared a common occupation & had had previous business dealings,
 - b. But the other 8 had little in common except *geography*; they all lived in Galilee.
3. Jesus took this rag –tag group, the original dirty dozen, & in only 3 years forged them into a tight-knit community that turned the world *upside down*.

C. Set The Scene

1. Our text this morning flows from our study *last week*; the healing of a lame man.
2. Peter & John were going to the temple to pray one afternoon when Peter realized God wanted to heal a lame beggar who sat in the Gate called Beautiful.
3. So he reached out, pulled him to his feet & the man was *instantly healed*.
4. He then went running through the temple, trying out his new legs & praising God.
5. He came running back to Peter & John, intent on being near the those who'd given him such a precious gift.
6. A crowd gathered to find out how this man they'd known for years as lame was now whole.
7. Peter then preached his 2nd sermon.
8. But *before* he could give a call to faith in Christ, the authorities came by & stopped them.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-3

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

1. The rulers of Jerusalem were deeply concerned about the new, fast growing sect they referred to as *Nazarenes* but we know as the church.
2. They thought the movement Jesus of Nazareth had started would *end* with His execution.
3. But the rumors of His rising from the dead had sparked a wild-fire of growth among His followers.
4. The original disciples had taken up His message & were filling the streets of Jerusalem with it.

5. What concerned the authorities were the reports of *miracles* the disciples were working.
6. It was bad enough when Jesus had done them. Now, *all eleven* were evidencing the same power.
7. But if these upstarts thought they could come *right into the temple itself* with their preaching, they had another thing coming.
 - a. Who did they think they are anyway?
 - b. They might be able to fool a few uneducated, superstitious *commoners* in the far reaches of the City,
 - c. But they were no match for the towering intellects of the temple guardians!
8. So they arrested Peter & John for disturbing the peace, inciting rebellion by promoting the cause of someone who'd already been *executed for sedition*.
9. Jewish trials could only be held during daylight & it was now too late to begin, so Peter & John were held over till the next morning.

B. V. 4

However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

1. What would happen in most American churches today if while the pastor was preaching, the police came in, cuffed him, read him his rights, and hauled him off?
 - a. Most congregations would be *scandalized* & think he'd done something really bad.
 - b. They'd turn away, throw up their hands & assume the preacher was a hypocrite.
2. *Unless* they knew he was being arrested for daring to speak a truth the authorities *had banned because it undercut their power*.
3. That's the situation here.
 - a. The crowds that gathered at the healing of the lame man couldn't deny the obvious miracle of his recovery.
 - b. When Peter said his healing was the work of Jesus Christ Who'd risen from the dead after the officials had crucified Him –
 - c. The crowds knew he was speaking words those officials would *disapprove* of.
 - d. But it's hard to arguing with the fact of a miracle that stands before them.
4. And even though Peter didn't get to finish his message with an *invitation*, their hearts finished it for him & brought them to the only reasonable conclusion –
5. Jesus *was* the Messiah. *He'd* risen from the dead. So faith in Him was the *right response*.
6. In Ch. 2 we read that the church grew to 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost. Here it grows another 2,000.

C. Vs. 5-7

And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done

this?”

1. The people gathered for this trial indicates just how *important* they recognized it was.
 - a. These were the *big-wigs* of Israel; the Jewish *Sanhedrin*, their Supreme Court & Congress rolled into one.
 - b. They deemed the emerging church a serious threat & came out now to determine what to do about it.
 - c. They'd thought the "Jesus Movement" would be like all the others *would-be messiahs* had sparked over the years.
 - d. Cut off the head & the movement dies.
 - e. Never before had it gone as this – get rid of the leader, & the movement *explodes!*
 - f. All the talk about Jesus *rising from the dead* worried them.
 - g. So the officials gathered to try these two rabble-rousers; probably thinking they'd be so *intimidated* they'd not have much to say.
2. The Sanhedrin met in a large, elegant building just west of the Temple.
3. Imagine you've been summoned to appear in Washington DC before a joint session of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the President of the United States.
 - a. You're on trial as a *traitor*. That's where Peter & John are here.
 - b. It would be a pretty intimidating moment for the average person & the Sanhedrin was *expecting* the disciples to adopt the usual posture of awe & cowering submission.
 - c. Charles Colson remarks on his days working for President Nixon.
 - 1) They regularly brought in people who were leaders of various groups & movements who wanted to see the government alter its policies.
 - 2) They came to the White House with courage & conviction, *determined* not to be cowed into submission or to let their supporters down.
 - 3) Nixon's staff knew these people were set on entering the Oval Office, giving the President a piece of their minds, & demanding he *do something*.
 - 4) So the staff had developed an elaborate strategy for *softening people up* & making them quiet & compliant when they met the President.
 - 5) They brought them in a couple hours *before* their appointment w/the President for a "tour" of the White House.
 - 6) They were taken to all of the *power centers* of the most politically powerful place on Earth.
 - 7) All of the rooms where special counsel was given by the foremost experts,
 - 8) Where decisions were made that affected the lives of *billions*.
 - 9) All White House staffers spoke of the President in the most *reverential* manner.
 - 10) The weight & power of the office of Chief Executive was the *constant theme*.
 - 11) And the *sacredness* of the Oval Office was *constantly rehearsed*.
 - 12) Colson said that of the hundreds of people who visited the President, *rare* was the person who wasn't influenced by this demonstration of power.

- 13) By the time they got to the Oval Office they were *subdued & apologetic* for *daring* to bother the President.
4. The Sanhedrin was used to having those who appeared before it sufficiently cowed by their power.
 5. They knew the people of Galilee, where John & Peter were from, thought the urbane & sophisticated people of Jerusalem *considered them* as backward, country bumpkins.
 6. That too would work in the Sanhedrin's favor, they thought – *but they thought wrong!*
 7. These officials didn't know who they were dealing with.
 8. They entered the hall, sat in their appointed seats, engaged in preliminary chit chat all calculated to *impress the uniformed* with how easily they wore their power,
 9. Then they turned to Peter & John & the trial began:
“By what power [authority] or by what name have you done this?”
 10. In the Sanhedrin's thinking, as *the* religious authority in Israel, they were the *only ones authorized* to sanction preaching & teaching.
 - a. So their question was *rhetorical*. In their thinking *there was no answer to it*.
 - b. This wasn't so much a question as a statement.
 - c. When they said, “Who gave *you the right* to do & say what you're doing & saying?” what they meant was we didn't authorize you, so how dare you come into the temple grounds with your rap about Jesus?
 11. But Peter saw their question *as an invitation to preach* yet another sermon.
 12. Jesus told the disciples there would come times when they'd be hauled before authorities for His name sake.
 - a. They weren't to worry about what to say.
 - b. In *that* moment, the Holy Spirit would give them the words.
 - c. And true to His promise, that's what happened here . . .

D. Vs. 8-10

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: “If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.”

1. Wait a minute—Who's speaking here? Who is this?
2. Is this the man *who ran away* when the mob arrested Jesus in Gethsemane?
3. Is this the same guy who just a few weeks before was standing in the high priest's courtyard, *denying* he was a disciple when challenged by a young slave girl?
4. Isn't this the guy who *swore 3 times* he was *no follower* of Jesus?
5. How can such a coward now stand before the Congress & Supreme Court of Israel & so boldly *declare* the name of Jesus?
6. How can he point his finger at these men & charge them with *murdering* the Messiah?
7. The answer lies in the first words of v. 8 = He was **“filled with the Holy**

Spirit”

8. Greek grammar makes it clear: Peter received a *special anointing* of the Spirit, just as Jesus had promised.

9. Peter began by *acknowledging the authority* of the Sanhedrin;
 - a. They *were* the rulers & elders of the people.
 - b. So they were responsible to God for their actions as they led the nation.
10. If they wanted to know by what authority the lame man had been healed, Peter was happy to oblige.
11. But they would not like his response, seeing they were the ones who'd condemned Jesus to death.
12. It's interesting the Sanhedrin *didn't debate* the reality of the miracle of healing.
 - a. That was a *given*; there was no denying it.
 - b. As we saw last week, the lame man was a long time, well-known fixture in the temple.
 - c. All knew his healing wasn't staged or faked; it was real!
13. And while the common people accepted it & what it *implied* about Jesus, the Sanhedrin *refused* to do the same.
 - a. Do to so would mean admitting they'd been wrong about Jesus.
 - b. It would mean accepting the fact they'd crucified the Messiah.
 - c. They were too proud to admit they were wrong.
 - d. Why, if we admit we're wrong about something as important as the Messiah, what can of worms would *that* open up?
 - e. I mean, all our decisions, all our judgments over the years would come into question.
14. I wonder how many *older people* come to a point where they realize the Gospel is true, but feel they *CAN'T* give in, *can't* surrender, *can't* come to faith.
 - a. They've argued *against* Christianity so long & hard it's their *reputation*.
 - b. They feel they have too much *invested* in unbelief.
 - c. To convert would look like *hypocrisy*, so commitment to a twisted concept of integrity binds them.
 - d. I've talked with a handful of the elderly who've *admitted* they've come to see their objections to faith are groundless.
 - e. But felt they couldn't come to a saving faith in Christ now at the end of their lives.
 - f. They just refused to take that step because it would mean admitting they'd been wrong all those years.
15. Sin is *always* foolish & unbelief is *unreasonable*.
16. And yet – people can have the evidence for Faith in Christ *right in front of them* & still miss what it points to.
17. That's what happened with the Sanhedrin.
18. No one is as blind as he who WILL not see.
19. The Sanhedrin *would not see* what the healed man *proved* because it would mean a change they were not *willing* to make.
20. Peter knew what was motivating them, so he asked if he and John were really

being tried for having done a good deed.

- a. Did the Sanhedrin oppose *healing*? Or did they just oppose healing in Jesus, name?
 - b. Did they think it better to *not* speak of Jesus & leave him crippled or to give him a new life?
 - d. If their job was to oversee the life of Israel & seek the public good how could they question the basis for this man's healing?
 - e. Or did their questions reveal a *different motive* – that they were only interested in maintaining their position of authority?
21. If the Sanhedrin thought Peter & John were going to be intimidated, Peter's opening words quickly set them straight.
22. I wonder how many of them heard this & said, "Wait a minute, who's on trial here?"

E. Vs. 11-12

"This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

1. The Gospels tell us following the Resurrection, Jesus took the disciples on an extended study of all those passages of the Bible that spoke of Him.
2. Peter refers to one of them here in, v 11 – This is Psalm 118, a familiar passage to every one of those sitting there that day.
 - a. Psalm 118 was understood by all as prophetic of the Messiah.
 - b. But there was *one part* of the Psalm that was an *enigma* to the rabbis.
 - c. They couldn't understand how this reference to a *rejected* stone would apply to the hoped for Messiah.
3. Jesus had quoted it when confronting the religious leaders with their *rejection* of Him.
4. Peter repeats it here with *unmistakable* intent;
 - a. These men of the Sanhedrin were the builders, the architects of Israel.
 - b. Jesus was the chief cornerstone they'd rejected
 - c. But God had taken Him & made Him into the foundation of a new work that *bypassed* them.
5. Peter knew some members of the Sanhedrin preferred plain speech, so in v. 12 he makes it *crystal*.
6. Salvation is located in one person, one name – Jesus.
7. They'd asked by what authority & whose name he'd healed the lame man. Short answer = **JESUS!**
8. And He's the ONLY One in Whom all the work & power of God is invested.
9. *Jesus* saves.
 - a. Not Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, or Moses.
 - b. Not Marx, Freud, Darwin, Maslow, Skinner, or Oprah
 - c. Not Mary Baker Eddy or Madame Balvatsky
 - d. *Jesus saves*, not books, tapes, CD's, DVD's, seminars, conferences, classes.
 - e. Not churches, movements, groups, meetings.

F. V. 13

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

1. The Sanhedrin was *speechless* in the face of Peter's boldness & wisdom.
2. Not bad for a couple of country-bumpkin, back-wood hicks!
 - a. It wasn't Peter & John who were on trial that day, it was the Sanhedrin.
 - b. They *marveled* because they realized the tables had been turned on them by a couple of guys they'd thought would be easy to dispatch.
3. Though Peter & John weren't scholars who'd come up through the rigors of formal training, they bore all the *semicha*, the authority, of full-fledged rabbis.
4. Indeed, they bore a striking resemblance to another man the Sanhedrin had recently tried & whom they thought they'd disposed of - Jesus.
5. But as John & Peter stood there before them it was like *deja-vu*.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Just Like Jesus*

1. Look at that last sentence of v. 13 again –
And they realized that they had been with Jesus.
2. Is there any higher compliment that could have been paid to John & Peter?
3. As boys their *chief ambition* had been to be disciples of a notable rabbi.
4. Jesus came along one day & invited them to follow Him.
5. And now, just a few years later, the highest court in Israel verifies & validating their greatest passion – not only were they Jesus' disciples, they'd become *just like Him*.
6. And it was *that* which enabled them to be used by God,
 - a. To heal a lame man,
 - b. To preach to & win multitudes to faith,
 - c. Then to witness to the highest authorities.
7. John & Peter *weren't* brilliant men.
 - a. They weren't born to privilege.
 - b. They were every day commoners, unexceptional, normal in every regard.
 - c. What made them able to be used by God is that *they followed Jesus*, they stayed with Him.
 - d. They simply accepted His invitation to be His disciples & stuck with Him – He did the rest.
8. That same invitation is extended to you & I.
9. God wants to use **you!**
 - a. The qualification for being used isn't brilliance, education, privilege, skill, talent, or any other human quality.
 - b. It's one thing – *yieldedness to Christ*.
10. If you want to be used by God, *hang out with Jesus*; spend time with Him.
11. "How?" You ask.
12. He is as present now as when He walked the hills of Galilee with the 12.
 - a. He's here with us now by the Spirit, Who will never leave nor forsake us.
 - b. This is His Word; read & study it. Meditate on it.
 - c. Pray.
 - d. Fellowship with other believers in whom the Spirit lives & works. For He

said, where 2 or 3 were gathered in His name, there He would be in a special way.