

Aim of lesson

To learn from Peter and John how to react to state opposition to the teaching of Christ.

Bible background

Acts 3 and 4:1-31.

Outline of lesson

A drama in Jerusalem

If you have a class who enjoy drama, then it is a good idea to give each of the class a character from Acts 3 and 4 beforehand. Ask them to read what happened and think about their parts. You may like to include a director to organise the performance or you may prefer to introduce each 'scene' yourself. This method ensures that all read the chapters and give some thought to what happened. You may decide to have a narrator and use the Bible as a script, or allow the class to use their own words. If the class prefer not to act, you could ask each 'character' in turn to explain what he did, and what happened to him. This second method allows attitudes and motives to come out, though it may be necessary to 'interview' the characters to bring out the whole story.

The lame man walks

Some points to make about the healing of the lame man:

- The man was over 40 years old (Acts 4:22). Normally a lame beggar could not expect to live very long.
- He was laid at the temple every day, and no doubt he had been there all through the ministry of Jesus without being healed. But God has his own time and his own way of doing things.
- Peter and John had already carried out many 'signs and wonders' (Acts 2:43) – so this healing of the lame man must have been special to cause so much trouble.
- The special thing may be that they had enabled a lame man to come into the temple (verse 8). People who were blind or lame were not allowed into the house of God (2 Samuel 5:8), but Jesus had healed the blind and lame in the temple (Matthew 21:14), much to the annoyance of the Jewish leaders. Now Peter and John were doing the same.
- The miracle was not just that his lameness was cured but that he became strong, and immediately had the skills to be able to walk and leap.

As a result, the Jewish rulers arrested not just Peter and John, but also the healed man (Acts 4:14).

Arrested

Ask the class to turn to their workbooks and write what they would answer if the Authorities spoke the words there to them. Compare the results with the words and attitudes of Peter and John in similar circumstances. You may like to point out that these attitudes can be found in many different parts of the world today, East and West, North and South.

Our attitude to the state

A balance should be made in the Christian's attitude to the state by looking at Romans 13:1-7. With the exception of where the law conflicts with God's teaching, a Christian should wholeheartedly obey and seek the good of the country or authority under which he lives.

Digging deeper

In Jesus' name

Peter and John made the lame man walk "in Jesus' name". The references show how the name of Jesus affected Peter and John, those who listened to the apostles, and how it can apply to us.

Relevance to our lives

You may like to have the class talk to a brother who has had to go on trial for refusing to fight for his country. Alternatively the class could consider different areas of the world and the challenges that each might bring to the way a Christian should live and teach.

Imagine what it would be like to become a Christian in a Moslem country, where that is punishable by death. In several countries it is illegal to belong to a church other than one recognised by the state. In other countries there is no provision for a Christian to avoid military service.

Prayer

After considering the prayer that the disciples said after Peter and John came out of prison, Acts 4:24-31, have the class write a prayer that they might say under similar circumstances.

Other suggestions for activities

- An older class may like to consider what Peter teaches about the return of Christ in Acts 3:17-21, noting particularly that the 'restoring everything' in v21 is beginning to be seen in our day in the restoring of the nation of Israel.
- The class could make a newspaper of the time of the events of Acts 3 and 4. Different members of the class could write articles about the healing, the arrest or the release. They could include interviews and illustrations.