

# THE ORIGINAL AMATEUR HOUR

ACTS 4:13-22    OCTOBER 9, 2019

Long before *The Voice* or *America's Got Talent*, *The Original Amateur Hour* aired in one form or another from 1934 to 1970. It started on radio and then moved to television. On each episode, contestants would come out and perform, and then the audience was asked to vote for their favorites by postcard or telephone.<sup>1</sup> Winners would be invited *back* to perform again. And if you won 3 times you were then eligible to compete in a championship round for \$2,000.

It's no longer a well-known program, but *The Original Amateur Hour* did bring some significant contributions to our pop-culture. It is where the phrase, "Round and round she goes, and where she stops nobody knows" came from. Contestants were selected at random by the spinning of a wheel.

Gladys Knight performed on the program at 7 years of age. Pat Boone appeared and won for several weeks. Other amateurs who rose to stardom after appearing on the show include Ann-Margret, Jose Feliciano, Tanya Tucker, Frank Sinatra, and Louis Farrakhan, who appeared in 1949, playing a violin.

When we left off last time, Peter and John had been brought before the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel, and were put on trial for healing a crippled man and preaching about Jesus Christ. Before these judges, Peter gave a powerful performance, in the form of a sermon. It was only the first of their appearances on this particular stage. But it was a defining moment, as opposition to the Church would now begin in earnest, as the Gospel simultaneously spread through Jerusalem.

As these powerful judges considered Peter and John, they conclude that they're *amateurs*. They're nowhere near as decorated, sophisticated or professional as the Sanhedrin. Yet, these amateurs speak with a power and effectiveness that causes the judges to marvel.

We left off at verse 12. Peter had just identified Jesus as the Cornerstone that Israel had rejected and declared that salvation could not be found anywhere but in Him. We pick up the story in verse 13.

**Acts 4:13 - <sup>13</sup> 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.**

Peter and John were fishermen. They had no training, no formal education, no expertise as far as the Sanhedrin were concerned. They were *amateurs* in their minds, in a pejorative way. And yet, these common men, like their Master before them, they spoke with real authority.

We aren't against formal education in theology or ministry (depending on the school you go to, of course). But the scene here proves that having a piece of paper doesn't give you spiritual authority. Remember what people said about Jesus when He was teaching: The people were astounded because He taught with *authority*, *not* like the Scribes, who had none. The Scribes were the educated experts. The academic gatekeepers to theology, as far as the culture was concerned. But their degrees didn't make them spiritual or right or even worth listening to.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Original\\_Amateur\\_Hour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Original_Amateur_Hour)

On the flip side, the Sanhedrin weren't impressed that day because Peter and John had great hype or an effective brand or swagger for days. Those are things that grab attention today, but the source of the Apostle's effectiveness is given right there: They had been with Jesus. They walked with Him. And so their lives were transformed in such a way that people couldn't help but wonder at them.

**Acts 4:14 - <sup>14</sup> And since they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in response.**

Their default mental position was anti-Jesus. They've made that abundantly clear. They *wanted* to contradict what had happened and what Peter had said, but they simply couldn't. There was the man, made new, right in front of them. He stands, once again as an example to us. This time he reminds us of the importance of actually *walking* the talk. If we're going to represent a God of love and grace and transformation, our lives have to actually be *renewed* by those things, so that the anti-Jesus world has nothing to refute.

Of course, none of us are perfect. And, even in Acts, the Apostles will make mistakes. But if we preach a God of holiness, we're to be holy. If we talk about forgiveness, we should be forgiving. Our lives should be an example of the power of God, just as the healed man's life was.

**Acts 4:15-16 - <sup>15</sup> After they had ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, they conferred among themselves, <sup>16</sup> saying, "What should we do with these men? For an obvious sign, evident to all who live in Jerusalem, has been done through them, and we cannot deny it!**

They couldn't deny it, but they were definitely going to *ignore* it. What a sad statement they've made here. Back in the 2016 election I remember seeing "Never Trump" bumper stickers and then you'd see "Never Hillary" ones. These guys were "Never Jesus". No matter what they saw, no matter what they heard, they would *not* accept Him as the Messiah.

We can pause for a moment for a little devotional thought here. We know God still speaks to us. Not just *generically*, but to you and I personally through His Word and by His Holy Spirit. Things go on in our lives and God is mindful of them and He speaks to us about them. We want to be careful not to *ignore* God when He speaks. That's what the Sanhedrin were doing here. If God's Word is speaking to you in your own reading or in a Bible study, take care not to ignore it. Instead listen and respond.

**Acts 4:17 - <sup>17</sup> However, so this does not spread any further among the people, let's threaten them against speaking to anyone in this name again."**

After everything they had seen, this was their plan. Wouldn't it have been wonderful if they would've said, "Let's go get some more crippled people and see if they, too, might be healed." But the hard hearts of these judges did not allow for such compassion. They wanted no more of this.

Our level of compassion for the lost and suffering around us is one good indicator of our spiritual health. Our God is a God of compassion. He's a God of tender-mercy. And He's given us His heart and sent us out into a world that desperately needs heavenly compassion. We're told in Colossians 3 to clothe ourselves with heartfelt compassion and kindness.

But things like greed and selfishness, the kinds of things that were filling the hearts of the Sanhedrin, crowd out mercy and compassion. If we find our own lives too crowded for kindness, we need to have the Lord do some maintenance in us. Let's check the compassion gauge in our hearts.

The callous cruelty of the Sanhedrin shocks us, but the same thing happens today. It reminds me of what's been happening in India in the last few years. Starting in 2014, the government has been coming against thousands of groups that they feel are engaging in "religious activities." The result is that, not only is the Indian government trying to muzzle the Gospel, it's also keeping people from being helped. And, like the Sanhedrin, the powers that be are fine with that.

*Compassion International* had worked in India for 48 years providing meals, medical care and schooling to countless thousands of children. In fact, *Compassion* repeated ranked as India's largest single foreign donor.<sup>2</sup> But, they've been forced out. What about the 115 million kids living in poverty? When a government is hostile to Christ, it does not care about the suffering in their midst.

**Acts 4:18 - <sup>18</sup> So they called for them and ordered them not to preach or teach at all in the name of Jesus.**

Even these unbelieving rulers understood: *The name matters*. Peter and John and the rest of their little club could have their meetings and come and go as they liked, but *stop talking about Jesus!* There have been times and corners of Christianity where people think it will be *better* to just soft sell a bit, don't be "preachy." "Let's not ram Jesus down people's throats." But the Bible tells us that we are saved by calling on the name of Jesus. We're told to pray and ask in the name of Jesus. We're told to *minister* in His name. We're washed and sanctified and justified in His name. It is His name that is above every other name and at His name every knee will bow and every tongue confess.

We are not called to soft-sell the Gospel! We're to proclaim it clearly and directly, naming Jesus Christ as God and King and Savior. Peter and John knew there was no Church and no Christianity without the name of Jesus and so we see their response in verse 19.

**Acts 4:19-20 - <sup>19</sup> But 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; <sup>20</sup> for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."**

They notify these judges that they will not be obeying this command. But notice *how* they do it: They're calm. They're courteous. They don't threaten them back. They aren't combative.

A few moments ago the Sanhedrin had *commanded* them to leave the room so they could try to find a way to punish them. Peter and John didn't resist. They didn't make a scene. They obeyed. Here, when forced to choose between sin or Savior, they make it clear they're going God's way. But they're not full of malice or hate. They're matter of fact, but composed and peaceful.

We live in a very agitated culture. Everyone's mad all the time. That's not a good thing, by the way. As Christians, we don't need to be constantly combative to the world around us. Look at the way Peter and John dealt with this attack. Or Daniel and his 3 friends. They don't start a riot. They don't threaten legal action. They just continue obeying the Lord. In other words, they don't fight fire with fire, they fight fire with Living Water. Our culture needs more of that.

At the same time, they weren't going to allow their culture to dictate what they would do. The Sanhedrin wanted them to make some changes to the way they did things, in ways that were in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/07/world/asia/compassion-international-christian-charity-closing-india.html>

contradiction to what God had commanded. The Church wasn't going to go along with that. Peter and John said, "Look, we've got to follow *God*, not you." God speaks. He leads. *He* directs. He is the one who should be shaping the progress of our personal spirituality and the methods and advances of our Church, not the culture. Sometimes, it seems, the Church falls into a trap. The idea is "we want to be contemporary and be able to engage with people around us." But what ends up happening is that the Church allows the worldly culture around her to dictate how she does things. "We *have* to do this because it's what the culture likes." That's not how the Apostles operated. They didn't want the culture around them to take the lead. They wanted *God* to lead.

Ultimately, real Christianity will always be counter-cultural. Maybe not in *every* way, but in very significant ways. Think of the all the Biblical examples: God's people in Egypt. God's people in Babylon. God's people in Rome. The believers in those stories weren't *camouflaged*. They stuck out like light in the darkness. And that attracted a lot of attention.

As a Church we shouldn't be trying to be more *cultural*. Instead we should be seeking after the Lord and His power. *God* should be the One dictating what we do and how we do it, not the world. Think about it: People weren't joining the Jerusalem church because it was a hip place. They were joining because the Gospel was changing lives. Because it was the one place where people could find real, spiritual truth.

Peter and John were going to continue walking in the leading and the power of the Holy Spirit, despite the opposition that was coming against them.

**Acts 4:21-22 - <sup>21</sup> 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; <sup>22</sup> for this sign of healing had been performed on a man over 40 years old.**

The good guys walked away with a win that day. What could the Sanhedrin do? Well, we'll find out in the very next chapter as this scene plays itself out again. We'll see the Apostles are healing people, preaching Jesus Christ, they get arrested, the Sanhedrin are confronted with an undeniable miracle. They can't find any wrongdoing on the part of the Christians, but *that* time they'll have them savagely flogged. From there, it's a hop, skip and a jump to the murder of Stephen and full blown violent persecution of the Church.

But, on this day in Acts 4, the amateurs had stunned the crowd. In some sense it reminded me of Susan Boyle's performance on *Britain's Got Talent*. The difference being that there was no worry that Piers Morgan or Simon Cowell might *kill* her after she sang.

Probably none of us are going to be brought before a panel of judges and made to give a defense of our faith tomorrow. Though, many of our brothers and sisters around the world do have to face that sort of test. However, as Christians, we are made to go out on the world stage to proclaim and represent Jesus Christ, clearly and effectively. You are a part of His visible Body here on the earth. You and I are instruments in His hand, meant to resound the life-changing message of the Gospel to anyone who will listen. To succeed in this life, you and I will need the continual filling of the Holy Spirit and the direction of the Word of God. And we will need to choose to take to the stage when God calls us out. Allowing Him to send us according to His purpose. Taking our cues from the Lord, not the culture. We may be amateurs to the world, but with the Holy Spirit empowering us and presenting us, we can become show-stoppers who bring help to the hopeless and glory to God.