

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Speaker: Mr. Douglas Pettman

Acts 4:1-31 - The first opposition to the Church

What tremendous and thrilling days were being experienced by the believers in the early days of the Church described in the book known as "The Acts of the Apostles". We see men who, but a short while before, had been cowering and hiding in fear, gazing into heaven as they witnessed the ascension of the Lord Jesus. In chapter 2 they continued with gladness and singleness of heart with the power of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 3 the power of the Lord was demonstrated in a miraculous way with the healing of the lame man. Surely, nothing could possibly go wrong now! They would go forward triumphant with their Lord. Yet we start chapter 4 with opposition and, for Peter and John, a night in prison. Let us look at this chapter today.

The testing, verses 1-4

The people of God have always found that as soon as a real work of God is going on some difficulty, trouble or opposition also appears. This book, which tells of the beginning of the Church, amply illustrates this. In chapter 20:29 Paul warns the elders from Ephesus, 'I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock'. In writing his first epistle, Peter refers to the trials being experienced by the Christians, 'that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ', 1 Peter 1:7. We must always accept that this will be so and we may ask ourselves why. The reason is simple. We have an Enemy, far more able than we are, who will use every device to spoil the work or stop the testimony given to the Name of the Lord Jesus. Satan sometimes comes as an 'angel of light', 2 Corinthians 11:14. He will seek to destroy. Sometimes he comes as 'a roaring lion' and he seeks to devour, 1 Peter 5:8. He is totally opposed to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ. So let us not think that, when we are active for the Lord Jesus, the work we do for Him will escape Satan's attacks. It is also important to realise that opposition is not necessarily the result of failure on our part.

Peter and John had healed a lame man in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. In our chapter we first find that the testing came in the form of opposition from those who should have supported every effort being made for God. Here were the temple priests and officers at the forefront and their difficulty was that the apostles 'taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead', verse 2. So the first thing is that the opposition came from within, not outside the followers of God. Secondly, these priests and officers were only formal followers and not real believers at all. Thirdly they set themselves out to attack the witness to the Lord Jesus Himself. When we find the attack is on the Person of the Lord Jesus and witness to Him, we know immediately that Satan is behind the opposition.

This led to a greater test and Peter and John were imprisoned for the night. Note that God did not stop this! He allowed it to happen and, in so doing, demonstrated that His work went on just the same. Although the temple authorities imprisoned Peter and John those who heard of the good news were so impressed that 'many of them...believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand', verse 4. We can be quite sure that God is not limited only to a vocally active testimony, He works in the heart by the Holy Spirit and the results are His. Yet we read in 2 Corinthians 6:1, we are 'workers together with Him'. What a privilege is ours to serve Him.

These 5,000 men believed. How did they believe? In order to believe, they needed to hear the message that the Lord Jesus, whom they had crucified, was risen again. They received the truth concerning the fact that He had died for their sin and applied it to their own need; they sought forgiveness from the Saviour who alone can save. They believed and this brought them eternal salvation!

The trial, verses 5-12.

So we come to The trial, verses 5-12. The Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin, came together. Verse 5 tells us of the three groups making up the Council. There were first the rulers, these were the priests and officials. Then we have the elders, that is, the heads of the chief families, and lastly the scribes, who were the interpreters and teachers of the law. It was a formal gathering with Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas who also acted in this capacity, and, among many others, John and Alexander who were obviously well known and important members of the Council. They had

the defendants standing in the dock and there, in the Council chamber, was the lame man who, only on the previous day, had been healed.

The charge they raised concerned the question: 'By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?' In Deuteronomy 13:1-5 the people of Israel were warned that if a sign or wonder took place by a prophet, who then said 'let us go after other gods' such a prophet was to be put to death. So the question was important. What would Peter say now? The Council questioned first the power and then the Name by which this was all done. Peter was ready with his reply and reversed the order. It was a matter of the Name first and then the power. This *good* deed was brought about in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. When they called 'on the Name of Jesus', they invoked all His authority for blessing and His power for healing. The apostle is so anxious to give every honour to his Lord, Jesus Christ. What a vital lesson this is.

'Jesus Christ of Nazareth' was the One they knew. He was known by the place, Nazareth, where He grew up. They could not miss the point as to the Person really involved. But He is also *Christ*, God's anointed One; not just a Man but God, the Son. There is no greater Name or power to seek.

Then, to emphasise the point, the members of the Council were reminded: 'ye crucified'... 'God raised' Him 'from the dead'. God determined to raise Him. It was through *His* divine power, and His alone, that there was resurrection and there is blessing.

So that they would not avoid the issue, Peter quotes from Psalm 118:22 to show that they, as builders, who had rejected the Lord Jesus, should see Him now as the Head, the Chief, the all powerful One.

Lastly, with a glow on his face and warmth in his voice, Peter drives home his message: 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved', verse 12. Thank God for the Lord Jesus Christ! How little Peter was concerned with the miracle and how much he directed his hearers to the 'Name' of Jesus. He should be the centre of our interest and all our concerns.

Would you accept that someone else could deal with your sin? Would you believe that another man could bring you salvation and give you a place in heaven? There is *none other Name*...whereby we *must* be saved. Because of our sin He was crucified, but God raised Him to show that He has dealt with our sin. He alone can save. Be sure of your salvation right now.

Great Turmoil (verses 13-17)

Now this reply of Peter brought great turmoil (verses 13-17) to this religious Court. Here were doctors of the law. Here were men of great experience and knowledge and they saw these men as 'unlearned and ignorant', that is, they had no special education, they had not been to college. They had once also belittled the Lord Jesus in this way, John 7:15. Let us be clear, education alone does not provide God's servants. What is needed is the presence of the Holy Spirit, that close walk with the Lord that empowers the person for service to their Lord in the way He directs. These men were prepared to address the Sanhedrin! What bold faith they showed. 'They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus', verse 13. The Council recognised these men, although uneducated, as having been with Jesus. Do you remember what is written of Moses when he came down from the presence of God, from the mount. 'When Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him', Exodus 34:30. A true walk with the Lord will always leave men of this world marvelling.

But more than just words, the evidence of the healed man standing with them was striking. We may question the healing of this man. Why was it so when the same evidence is not seen in the same way today? It demonstrated beyond doubt, in a totally new situation, the commencement of the Church and the availability of the power of God to man. But it also demolished the opposition which unbelieving man raised. We notice that this man said nothing. He was 'standing with them', verse 14, as evidence that the power of God was surging through him. That evidence was so vital to the proceedings. It is not always what we say that makes the difference, it is what we are! The true Christian life just needs to be *seen* to be a real testimony to the Saviour. Similarly, Lazarus, who was raised to life by the Lord, and who said nothing, was such a testimony that 'the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death' because of the testimony of his life, John 12:10. We read in verse 14, 'They could say nothing against it'. Is my life really effective in this way? Is yours?

The Council were in such turmoil they could only say among themselves, 'what shall we do?' and 'we cannot deny it', verse 16. What is more, all the people knew of this wonderful miracle.

The threats (verses 18-22)

So we come to the threats (verses 18-22) which were made. The Council could not properly judge the matter so they made further threats to these men warning them 'not to speak at all nor teach in the Name of Jesus', verse 18. Peter had a ready answer to this. There was something for them to judge! 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye', he says, verse 19. Does God come first? Who takes the first place in our life?

Then Peter adds how imperative it is to speak what 'we have seen and heard', verse 20. Here is a witness which demands action. What sort of testimony do we give to the Lord who has saved us and blessed us beyond our wildest imaginings? How different are the threats of this world! James 3:15 tells us, 'This wisdom' (of the world) 'descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish'. We can understand that opposition to Christianity is opposition to what is good; opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ is against conclusive evidence of what is right. This Council could 'find nothing', verse 21.

Their Thankfulness (verses 23-31)

We come to our last point - their thankfulness (verses 23-31) to God in all that has happened. What unity is evident among them! This unity is shown in their purpose. 'They went to their own company', verse 23. Perhaps we would have gone home? The company of believers was so much more important to them. Here was the greatest sense of comfort and oneness they could find. What a difference there might be to our testimony if we followed this course with other believers today.

Next we see their unity in discussion. We read that 'they reported all that the chief priests and elders had said', verse 23. How vital it is that there was freedom of discussion, no offence is taken, no accusation made. All was done in the appreciation that everything was in the hands of the Lord Jesus and all believers are united in Him.

Their prayer was also united. We read, 'they lifted up their voice to God with one accord', verse 24. They prayed together! They prayed concerning the difficulty that faced them. What encouragement this gave them all.

It is good to see, also, how they prayed. Here thankfulness comes through in all that they had to say. They addressed the 'Lord'. The Greek word used is unusual. It means 'despot'. Thus they fully accepted the absolute rule and total sovereignty of God. The authority of such a Lord can never be challenged!

Then they quoted from Psalm 2 to describe the actions of these people. In the wisdom of God He allowed 'the kings of the earth' to rage and gather together against the Lord. Then they included each group which was involved in the judgement and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. There was Herod, the Jewish authority; Pilate, representing the Gentile power; the Gentiles who were outside of any covenant with God and Israel who were God's covenant people. All were involved. When we pray do we bring before the Lord those who may cause difficulty in our circumstances?

More especially, they assert that all that was done was within the counsels God had determined. How important it is to realise that nothing could be done unless allowed of God. Like them, let us get hold of this great fact that God is ever in control.

In Isaiah 37:14-16 we read of King Hezekiah, who took the letter he had received from his enemies and spread it before the LORD before praying about it. So these believers commended 'their threatenings' into the care of their Lord, verse 29. They did not request an end to the threatenings but knew they could fully trust God. Their prayer was that the Lord would help them to continue to be bold in their witness. We need that faith every day.

How wonderful for them that they received such a positive approval of their requests. 'The place was shaken'. 'They were all filled with the Holy Ghost', verse 31. Today we do not see that form of confirmation but the Scriptures assure us of the presence of the Holy Spirit with us day by day. That singleness of heart which these believers had for the things of the Lord is as vital today, if we want to see the full power of the blessing of the Holy Spirit at work. It led to these servants speaking 'the word of God with boldness', verse 31. May the Lord help each one today, just to have our sights on Him and our only desire be for His glory.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, in each of our lives today and in the testimony we offer, may we be a living testimony to Thee. May others see in us Christ living within that they may be attracted to Thee. Amen.

Let us close with the words of a chorus we used to sing:

*Keep me shining, Lord,
Keep me shining, Lord,
In all I say and do;
That the world may see
Christ lives in me,
And learn to love Him too.*

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