

## Boldness In The Midst Of Opposition

### Prior Warning

In Acts chapter 2 the church experiences the gift of God's dynamic power as the Holy Spirit is poured out. In Acts 3, the church experiences incomprehensible growth as three thousand souls are cut to the heart and repent by Peter's bold preaching. We further see in Acts 3 the event, the healing of the lame man which is the proof that the Apostles are continuing the ministry of Jesus. This is verified as Peter stands with the lame man and offers up many infallible proofs that it was not, he or John who healed this man, but the healer was Jesus Christ, Himself.

Now, the honeymoon is over, so to speak, and it is time to come down off the clouds to the real world and enter into real life, as it were. Trouble is brewing and it shows itself in opposition and persecution. The battle has begun.

Jesus had already warned His followers that they will experience hatred and persecution from those within the religious community. Notice Jesus' logic found in John chapter 15, <sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." Jesus warned believers before persecution came, so that, when it came, they would

remember His warning and be prepared. Acts chronicles the beginning of resistance by the world to the name of Jesus and its persecution of His followers and this continues to this very day.

There is a pattern that one can trace through the Book of Acts, especially in the earlier chapters. The pattern goes something like this. Everything is going well and then a trial takes place. When the trials come the Apostles deliberate and pray to guide them as they decide what the right thing to do is based on God's Word and leading of the Holy Spirit. They take the approach of prayer and the study of God's Word and God blesses this process and their efforts.

This pattern is how all churches should operate and how every individual Christian should live. We will have trials and opposition, that is a given; it has happened since the church began and will continue until Jesus' return. What is important is how we respond when the trials come our way. To know the right path, one needs time with God, both in prayer and in the Bible.

Observe the opposition that is encountered in today's text of the first half of Acts chapter 4 and then look for how the Apostles respond and observe what God does.

**Primary Theme - *The world hates Jesus because He is not of this world. Satan is the prince of this world and he opposes all that is of God.***

## **Pray**

As believers we are in a cosmic battle of eternal good vs. evil. We have a need to be bold in a world of unbelievers. What do we do when we experience resistance concerning our Christian faith? It is clear in this sinful world that Christians will experience trouble. What will we do when it happens to us? This

passage shows us the Apostles in action. It shows us their response to threats and persecution. They do not back down or water down the message one bit but instead, stand firm for their Lord. I pray in our lives, we too, stand firm when we meet opposition and persecution because of the Gospel message.

### **Inspired to Boldness**

Immediately there were two results to Peter's bold proclamation of the Gospel; people believed and opposition came. Reading from Acts chapter 4, at verse 1, "And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup> greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. <sup>4</sup> **But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.**" Even in the midst of the Good News, which was gaining momentum, there were those who greatly opposed the message of the Gospel because the evil one hates and opposes God and many people are under his control.

The Temple Guard were like the sheriff whose job was to maintain the peace and maintain acceptable Jewish orthodox teaching within the temple grounds. The Sadducees were in charge of a temple police or guard which was made up of armed Levites whose job it was to maintain the peace within the temple grounds and not allow any disturbances. It was this same temple guard that joined with the Romans to arrest Jesus not more than 2 to 3 months prior by of the high priest and the Sadducees who were responsible to oversee the proper teaching in and around the temple.

It is interesting just how quickly word travels. This man has just been healed and Peter has just offered an explanation in the form of a Gospel Sermon as to what was going on and what the people needed to do - namely repent and believe in the Christ. All who were in charge, the Sadducees and temple guards were greatly annoyed and sought to regain control.

The focus of their aggravation was the fact that these two men, Peter and John were preaching a message different to the accepted beliefs of the Jews. The Jews taught salvation based on works; the Apostles were teaching salvation by grace. We must always keep in mind the two, works and grace as the means of salvation do not mix. They are such polar opposites, that for someone who believes that salvation comes through works, to even think there is salvation through free grace in Christ is extremely offensive. However, the Jewish leader's house of cards will quickly come down in light of free grace. One thing all cults or false religions share in common is salvation by works for it feeds man's desire to control.

Not only were the Apostles teaching that salvation is only through Jesus but they were also teaching about the resurrection, something the Sadducees adamantly opposed. Pharisees believed in an afterlife, but the Sadducees did not.

Notice what happened and how the events unfold. The Apostles preached the Gospel and then are arrested. Since Peter and John were servants of God, it is important to note that the Gospel was not arrested. The Gospel of Christ was planted as a seed that day, then somehow during the night, as it were, it sprouts and begins to grow. Reading verse 4, [“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”](#) There is always a running joke about preachers and numbers. When asked how many do you have in attendance, most every preacher will estimate and answer with the highest

possible figure. Here, Luke reports that the number has now grown to 5000 people. Probably this includes the 3000 from Pentecost, but not necessarily and even though it specifically states men, it probably means everyone. At minimum still, 2000 people believed. It is just Peter's second sermon and we are up to about 5000 people and the number is higher when women are added. While Peter and John are put in jail but the Word of God begins to grow in the hearts of those who heard. There is also another pattern we can observe. During times of persecution, the Gospel accomplished greater victories than in times of peace. Perhaps, the people see that what these two men were saying is extremely relevant especially if they are risking their lives to preach it. The power is always in the Word of God and the re-generational power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Challenging Opposition**

Luke continues showing amid the amazement there follows opposition by the authorities and yet Peter and John remain bold for the Gospel, taking up the narrative at verse 5, “On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, <sup>6</sup> with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. <sup>7</sup> And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’ <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you 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 is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> **This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.** <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one

else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Do you remember these names? Elders and scribes of Jerusalem, Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas. It had just been only a few months ago, that these men; elders, scribes, Annas (the true high priest) and his son-in-law Caiaphas (the acting high priest) all came together to murder Jesus. They were a force to be reckoned with. These men are the ones who murdered Jesus, and now arrest Peter and John. Do you think Peter and John were afraid? I think they were no more afraid than Stephen.

In Acts chapter 7, Luke gives us the account of Stephen’s testimony and his stoning. Stephen <sup>55</sup>“full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ <sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. <sup>58</sup> Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup> And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, ‘**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**’ <sup>60</sup> And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep.’ (Acts 7:55-60) Things were not as they were a few months earlier, where Peter denied Jesus 3 times, for now Peter is filled with the Spirit of God and stands boldly before these murders and proclaims Jesus as the Christ. These men who did not believe in resurrection - are faced with Jesus’ resurrection and it threatens their power and control.

Observe the hard hearts of these religious leaders. They were not rejoicing with this healed man. They were not celebrating because he could now walk. They

were cold and unloving toward him. You see, works religion is only concerned with self and control and power, not with others. If one has to maintain a certain level of good works to stay saved, then that is all they are concerned with. They are not going to love others as God calls them to. Christ puts servant hearts into His believers and this causes them to love God more than themselves.

This works based and self-centeredness may even be seen at times in true believers or even in yourself, if one takes their focus off of Christ. If you find yourself not loving others like you should, it may very well be that you are trying very hard to stay saved and be in control and this leads to having no compassion toward others. There just is not time to love and care for others if you just barely maintain your own salvation. Relying on self instead of Christ brings self-worship, this is exactly what happened to Lucifer.

### **Speaking Through The Holy Spirit**

There is a difference between a heart for the world and one who has the servant heart of Christ. Verse 8 tells us, “[Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit](#)” There were two major factors fueling the Apostle’s boldness to proclaim the Gospel, even in the face of opposition and persecution; first, as is mentioned here, the indwelling Holy Spirit. If someone is walking in the Spirit or filled with the Spirit, they will be bold evangelists, a Spirit filled heart seeks God’s glory. Second, they had been with the risen Lord and knew He was the Christ and they lived for His glory. They saw Him die and they saw Him for forty days after the resurrection, and He taught them what they would need to know. For Peter and John, God is everything, but the world retains little meaning beyond dead souls that need resurrection by the power of the Lord.

As with Peter's first sermon, he makes sure that they know that they are God's enemies. Verse 10 makes this clear, "let it be known to all of you 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 is standing before you well." They murdered God's only Son, the Author of Life. God the Father raised Jesus the Son from the dead. These men with hearts of stone, focused on their own power, murdered Jesus, but God resurrected Him. They are showing themselves to be God's enemies and aligned with the evil one. It is the evil one that promotes people to seek their own self-interest at the expense of others.

These men rejected God's cornerstone for the salvation of mankind. Reading verse 11, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone." Here Peter and uneducated man quotes scripture to these men who should have known the scriptures. David wrote of what God would do through Jesus, <sup>19</sup>"Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. <sup>20</sup> This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. <sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. <sup>22</sup> **The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.** <sup>23</sup> This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. <sup>24</sup> This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:19-24) The building being built is the Lord's doing. Peter, in a very clear and direct way is giving more proof that these leaders are working against God. In their building of works religion, they have rejected the cornerstone of God, who is Jesus. He is not useful at all in their building plans. When they unroll the blueprints, there is nothing that even resembles Jesus in their structure. God however, is going to tear their plans down. His eternal building has Jesus as the most important stone in the entire structure, the Cornerstone. In God's plan to restore all things, Jesus is the



most crucial part. He is vital to God's structure. Again, what they reject, God adores and prizes. Those who saw God's glory in Peter's healing and teaching were amazed and those who were of the world persecuted God's servants.

## **Driven By The Truth**

Peter and John remind these Jewish leaders of Jesus and that God sent Him. Peter and John had been trained by Jesus and handle the Scriptures in a similar manner. Peter and John are bold to proclaim the truth, just as Jesus did. In these ways and, I am sure others, these Jewish leaders recognized that these men had been with Jesus and they possess a power they do not understand but desperately want for their own. As I read beginning at verse 13 note 2 important words; **boldness** and **opposition**. “Now when they saw the **boldness** of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in **opposition**. <sup>15</sup> But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, <sup>16</sup> saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.’ <sup>18</sup> So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, <sup>20</sup> for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’ <sup>21</sup> And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. <sup>22</sup> For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.” Like Jesus, public opinion was on the side of the Apostles

not the Jewish leaders. These leaders were also unable to escape the fact that the lame man was standing beside them all by himself. They did not really care about this man and I am sure for them, his standing there was inconvenient. In the end, Peter and John were not going to stop speaking about Jesus, no more than they could live but not breathe. Regardless what the authorities said or did Peter and John would proclaim Jesus. The pattern began with Jesus and then the Apostles and it is to continue with us – preach the Gospel with boldness, some will respond with astonishment and some will respond with opposition to God.

This is a good lesson for us, when the authorities command us to go against the Word of God, we must obey God rather than men. He is our authority not some law passed by man. In a well-ordered society, they both God’s Word and man-made law should be in unity with each other. It seems in our time and our nation, and really the world at large, God’s law and man’s law are getting farther apart. But Jesus said this would happen and grow worst throughout history until His return. No matter what the level of resistance is, we will experience it but need to always declare God’s glory. I like the way Peter said it, <sup>3</sup>“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is

inexpressible and filled with glory,<sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:3-9)

My beloved, Jesus, our Lord and Savior, Peter and all the Apostles tell us to prepare for battle because the world opposes all that is of God and is right and good. Paul is commanding each one of us and us as a community of believers to battle, Paul instructs,<sup>10</sup> “**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.** <sup>11</sup> **Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.** <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> **Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.** <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the **breastplate of righteousness,** <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the **gospel of peace.** <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the **shield of faith,** with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the **helmet of salvation,** and the **sword of the Spirit,** which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> **praying at all times in the Spirit,** with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, <sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Ephesians 6:10-20) My beloved, God is calling us to arms, let us prepare for battle and fight for the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus! Let me close with a statement by C. S. Lewis, that sums up how I feel about this spiritual battle we are in, “My prayer is that when I die, all of Hell rejoices that I am out of the fight.” Amen!