

The Prominence of Opposition
Grace Bible Chapel
Outline: The Acts of the Apostles – Acts 4:1-4
June 4th, 2017

Context: As Peter continues his second message and John joins in the discussion “as they were speaking” with an obviously large crowd on the Temple Mount, they are swiftly confronted and silenced by being arrested by the religious authorities. Verse 2 tells us why they were arrested “being greatly disturbed because...proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

This account is the first persecution of the early church. It will intensify from this point forward and continues to this day. I will take opportunity today to look at what Christ had to say about persecution, and what our own understanding and thinking should be regarding this most important subject. Even this early account reminds us to expect very strong opposition. Living in an environment free of opposition to the truth is not a reality in this current fallen world. Persecution does two important things in the sovereign history of the church. It separates out those truly of God from those who are merely religious, and it does not stop the spread of the Gospel, but causes it to spread.

Broad outline of Acts (underlined is the immediate context).

- VI. The Power Needed (Acts 2:1-6:7)
 - F. Second Message (Acts 3:1-4:12)
 - 3. Sincere appeal (Acts 3:17-26)
 - 4. Strong opposition (Acts 4:1-12)

Key Words

- Resurrection
- disturbed
- proclaiming
- laid hands
- jail

Introduction:

- One of my favorite commercials – Investment organization – people business suits with their heads stuck in the ground, once in a while raise head, see what others are doing – run hysterically with others – scene backs off – all these are running together & it shows they are about to go headlong over a cliff.
 - Such is the manner spiritually of the world – in man’s sinful blindness he has his head in the sand – when he does look around at his circumstances, he sees only what others like him are doing, panics, and runs with the crowd.
 - Of course what man needs is not direction from others who are ignorant & blind spiritually, but direction from God – we have that in the Bible.
 - We are coming to the end of Peter’s second message recorded in the history of the early church – Peter is on the Temple mount – many Jews are there, a man born lame from birth has been supernaturally healed, & Peter has used the circumstance to proclaim Jesus Christ as the power of healing & Messiah.
 - Beginning in 4:1-2 is opposition – there is a lot summarized in these 2 verses.
- 4. **Strong opposition** (Acts 4:1-12)
 - Several important matters to consider in this context:
 - It was not wrong for those in authority to be checking out matters on the Temple Mount – that is their role & responsibility.
 - However, what is the number one priority of the Temple? God, truth, His glory!
 - Consider what Peter & John were about:
 - They had healed a beggar born lame at the Golden Gate.
 - They were proclaiming the source of power behind the healing.
 - Based on the miracle & the Scripture they were declaring Jesus as the Messiah – the One all Israel had been looking for & anticipating.
 - Where else would be a more appropriate place than on the Temple mount dedicated to God, to Scripture, to truth, to all spiritual teaching, discussion, expression, & even debate.

- **Point:** Consider the true character of these religious men, the blindness of hell is in them, to imprison these for a wonderful & obvious a miracle in the name of Christ – Peter & John were not promoting taking of arms or an insurrection. They were proclaiming Scripture – encouraging repentance & turning to God.
 - Opposition will be everywhere! Everyone we encounter in life is either part of the problem or part of the solution. Most are in opposition! How do I know?
 - Mat. 7:13 - Everyone is moving thru life thinking they are doing their best, they are on the right track - which most measure by wrong standards, looking at others, following traditions, listening to wrong sources rather than the Word.
 - This picture by Christ is one of a spiritual track – that is obvious by the ultimate destinations – only two – there are no allowances - the ultimate difference – one encompasses all wrong & the other the exclusively right.
 - There are only two to be on – one is broad, popular, easy, politically correct – those on it are comfortable, sincere, & completely deceived. Why? It leads to destruction (a very strong word – it results in eternal hell).
 - The other, the right one, difficult, unpopular, not easy to find, not easy to continue on because it is narrow, against the flow, but it is the right one – why? It leads to life – eternal life – the only way to eternal life.
 - This is the way God planned & determined this matter of life to be by faith.

Point: This is huge – the way to God through Jesus Christ is not the popular, obvious, easy, most attractive way – put all notions of modern Christianity mixed with worldliness, humanistic philosophy, etc. aside – understand God’s way is not man’s way – never has been, nor is it today – this broad way & narrow way still exist!

- **Swift interveners** (Vs. 1)
- **Vs. 1** - Who are these? Priest, Temple guard, Sadducees – these are all broad road people! Being who they are, doing their job (so to speak) following their best human reasoning – closed minded to true spirituality. Sincere but wrong & ultimately without excuse as they are not listening to God & not seeking God.
 - Priest – performing religious sacrifices yet not recognizing the very One for whom all the ceremonies point had been in their midst only days before & these priests had been a significant part of the horrid unrepentant opposition.
 - Temple guard – his purpose is to make sure order & appropriateness is maintained at the Temple – there is not been anything going on at the Temple more appropriate than the presentation of Christ by Peter & John. But these guards are also duped into thinking they are doing the right thing.
 - Sadducees – one sect of the ruling religious leaders- the liberal aristocrat wing. These are responsible to lead the people in the truth of God – their job was to represent God & help the people know Him – they did the opposite!
 - In Mat. 22:23 – we are told they did not believe in resurrection, nor literal interpretation of Scripture – so they are particularly offended as we are told in Vs. 2 because Peter was proclaiming Christ’s resurrection.
 - So these are the initial offended confrontational group, unreasonable, unwilling to think of anything other than their cast in stone high minded ideas of religion, not from God but from their own minds & traditions.
 - We will see when we get to Vs. 5 – all the religious rulers (including Pharisees – the literal & conservative religious) will join together in opposition to Peter, against the truth, & therefore ultimately against God.
- (Mat. 23:2-7) – these leaders brand of spiritual life is selfish & surface only – look at one of the woes of Christ (Vs. 23:27) – inside they were rotten, no change of heart, no God within – just religious – look back at Vs. 15 – make proselytes – others just like themselves – religious &

dead, on the wrong road – the broad road, & actually in real opposition to the truth & ultimately to God.

Point: It should strike us how quickly & how prevalent, & I will say how consistent those in rabid opposition to truth always show up & always do the same things.

Point: they are also in the most prominent & generally considered unlikely places – places of supposed leadership & wisdom – in universities, pulpits, & high places.

- John 15:18-19 – here is the clear warning by Christ. The reason Christ was crucified, I know it was in God's sovereignty, but man as the instrument hated Christ because he naturally hates truth. 1 John 3:13 – John warns again, “do not be surprised” – Luke 6:26 addresses the negative side “woe to you when all men speak well of you” (referring to your spiritual beliefs & non-compromising stand on the truth in Christ) – something is wrong when the unrighteous embrace you as one of them – find you appealing & acceptable.

Point: If you are in Christ, you don't fit-in here. That doesn't mean you go around trying to cause friction, but when you stand up for truth in Christ, you will cause friction, anger, opposition, & hatred – why? John 3:19 “men love darkness...evil”.

- **Suppressors of truth** (Vs. 2)

- **Vs. 2** – so naturally these on the broad road, the unsaved, are going to be immediately offended by the words of Peter. Why? We have gone there many times (Rom. 1:18-22) – these are those who naturally are offended by truth – they suppress it, or hold it down – try to avoid, because it is offensive to them.
- Notice the phrasing “being greatly disturbed” – nothing stirs as the truth does!

Point: And as we continue our march through this history, the book of Acts, we will see persecution as a consistent reality increased, & with greater & greater intensity.

- **Scurrilously brazen** (Vs. 3) – idea is these are abusively brazen - have you considered how amazingly brazen is evil, & the progenitors of untruth, unrighteousness, & injustice? – this should be obvious to anyone with discernment in politics, & how much more so in the areas of life dealing with men's souls.
- **Vs 3** - These are swift to shut up Peter & John “laid hands on them ... in jail.”
 - This is why our wise USA forefathers added the first amendment of free speech – the freedom to express your opinion without being silenced or jailed – something near extinction in our deceived, pagan, humanistic, angry society.
 - Our text begins the persecution of the church which will permeate the world.
 - Since this event, & we are now two thousand years later, it is estimated there have been more than 100 million Christian martyrs & countless oppositions!
- Let's consider for a moment some fundamentals on persecution: Christian persecution is the hostility experienced as a result of identification as a Christian.
 - Why will people want to persecute you? Luke 21:12; 16-17 “for My names sake” or because of My name “– because you are ID'd with Christ, Satan is the prince of the fallen world, & all the unsaved are under his domination (John 8:43-44). Christians are the aliens. But, when persecuted we are blessed (Mat. 5:11-12).
 - John 16:1-2 – Christ Himself warned of persecution so that they & we would not stumble when it comes. Also, recognize the persecutors don't think they are doing something wrong (Vs. 2) – they are spiritually deceived / blind.
 - 2 Tim. 3:12 – Anytime truth is proclaimed, & lives are changed there must be persecution. It is not something to be sought, but it must raise its head.
 - Acts 14:22 – (after Paul stoned at Lystra) – it is part of the Christian life. It challenges and proves the genuine nature of our faith.
 - James 1:2-4 – informs us that persecutions / difficulties are for our testing, & proving of our faith, & it produces endurance making us more Christ-like.

- It also does not stop God's work (I will build My Church), but if anything reinforces the supernatural nature of His work.
- **Sovereign accomplishment** (Vs. 4)
 - **Vs. 4** - The best presentation of the truth of the Christian is faith demonstrated in a changed life that is willing to speak out & be faithful to God no matter what.
 - Rom. 8:35 – listed among those things that will not separate us from God.
 - “came to be about five thousand” – there is some debate among scholars as to whether this number included the 3000 of Acts 2:31. God has promised to transform lives by His Word. Beloved, the name of Jesus still has power. And, when that power is coming from a changed life it has an undeniable effect.

Closing:

- Recognize - whenever & wherever God is truly honored, truth is present, & Satan shows up to rebuff – he often uses those merely religious, those in authority, or even our next of kin. Expect it, but do not let it trouble or stop you!
- Instead see what God is doing - Luke 21:13-19!
- Are you ready by God's strength to fight the fight of faith?– opposition is coming!
- The fight is worth it. You must trust God, see His sovereign hand, no matter what.
- Line yourself up with the Lord Jesus Christ – you will ultimately win – cannot lose.
- I titled this “the prominence of opposition” – it is everywhere, but there is a power much greater than the opposition – it is the power of Jesus Christ! Look to Him!