

Handling Opposition

Grace Bible Chapel

Completed Notes: The Acts of the Apostles – Acts 4:23-31

July 30th, 2017

Context: Our context is the second message by Peter following the work and resurrection of Christ. They had been jailed overnight because of their preaching. After being commanded not to preach, even though they stated they must, and threatened further they are released. Significantly this is the start of intense persecution of the church. We are reminded that Christ told them (John 15:18) the opposition would be great. It is essential to understand Christianity and its message and to know that the church from the beginning has been and continues in a spiritual war. This first test establishes the expectation and forms how the church must respond to opposition and persecution at all times.

After being released Peter and John immediately went to the other Christians and reported all that had taken place. The immediate response was a union of prayer seeking the Lord's help. The substance of the prayer (Acts 4:24-30) is instructive. They expressed their confidence in God using the Scriptures, poured out their situation before the Lord, and did not seek relief from persecution but the strength of God to persevere in whatever circumstance His providence chose. The substance of their prayer was for the message to continue to go forth in transforming power. As a result of their unified and God-centered prayer, the Lord responded by giving them internal strength through the Holy Spirit now residing in each of them. This forming of the church amid strong opposition and with reliance on God to work by His power serves as the foundation for the church in the world today.

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

VI. The Power Needed (Acts 2:1-6:7)

F. Second Message (Acts 3:1-4:22)

G. Sovereign forming (Acts 4:23-6:7)

Key Words

- against (3)
- gathered (3)
- servant (3)
- together (3)
- boldness

Pre-introduction:

God is forming His church right after the work of the cross, the resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Following Peter's second message on the Temple mount (taking the opportunity after the healing of the lame man) he and John are thrown in jail. They have now been threatened and released. Our text continues today showing the church was formed in opposition & persecution.

Introduction:

- The start of any worth-while endeavor tells us much about not only the value of the endeavor, but the continued purpose & expectation of the same endeavor.
 - We are engaged in studying the amazing history of the founding of the church.
 - The purpose of its beginning has not changed, and the circumstance of its beginning (that is the world's opposition) has not changed.
 - The true church has always & continues to be engaged in spiritual warfare.

Point: Therefore – going back to the roots of the church is healthy – there is much to learn, much to clarify – God has not changed, the world has not changed in its attitude of opposition, & the purpose of the church has not changed, nor our means of dealing with opposition.

G. Sovereign forming (Acts 4:23-6:07)

1. Situation of Opposition (Vs. 23)

- **Vs. 23** – “Went to their own companions” – one of the reasons many who claim the name of Christ are weak, vulnerable, confused, depressed, troubled – they don't do as the Word commands “do not forsake” (Heb. 10:25).
 - (1 Thess 5:11; 14) – “urge you” – Paul is addressing very troubling times – to neglect the getting together is a denial of the spiritual battle & need for others.
 - It is part of our ministry to one another – *birds of a feather flock together*, even the deer in my neighborhood do this – rarely do you see one by itself. We need each other, – God commands this!

- “reported” – a pang gelo – announce – this was no small thing. They wanted all involved to know the circumstances of the opposition. This is their life, they are sharing it with those of like faith, & considering how they will deal with opposition!

Point: Opposition continues today – just as real, just as strong – have you faced it & set in your mind on how you will deal with it when it comes your way?

2. **Solidarity in prayer** (Vs. 24-30)– they knew where to turn– in contrast to Sanhedrin (Acts 4:15-16) “confer with one another” – these would together confer w/God.

- “With one accord” – these are unified in one mind. Do you know how powerful that is? (1 Pet 3:12-14) in a context of persecution this is an amazing promise! The unity around Christ is glorious, powerful, & rich in encouragement (Ps. 133).
- **Source for strength** (Vs. 24-26)
- **Vs. 24** – “Lifted their voices to God” – this is very telling! When something traumatic occurs, otherwise unHINGING, to destroy our peace & comfort – what is our immediate response? – anger, foul language, taking things into our own hands – or do we lift our voice to God?
 - “O Lord” – despotace – despot – an absolute sovereign ruler (not the usual name for God) – the emphasis is - they immediately go to the One who is in charge of every person, event, happening in history!
 - “It is You” – they give the glory to God, recognizing all that exists is by His power, wisdom, & authority – implied is that this situation is not difficult for God, nor has it caught Him by surprise – they are coming to Him as children.

Point: Our nailed down view of God is directly related to faithfulness – if I see God as in complete control, wise, powerful – bringing about whatever is taking place, ruling in the affairs of man for His purposes – than I will trust Him...trust Him & act faithfully!

- **Vs. 25 -26**– Then they quote Ps 2 – about prophecy of the foolish opposition of unsaved man at every level. It is the lost man’s natural bent of rebellion against God. Ps 2 is a warning for the unsaved of the earth, but it is also a clarification to the people of God to expect extreme opposition – that opposition is against Christ, & therefore His people, His message, anything associated with Him.

Point: Naming the name of Christ! Teaching His truth is not going to cause any person to win a popularity contest. Men in their natural sinful condition “love darkness rather than light” (John 3:19).

- By-the-way that is why many assemblies have turned away from the truth of Scripture – it is just too hard, there is just too much opposition, it is perceived to be too negative!
- Let’s instead talk only of love – or a perverted form of love, man’s self-centered idea of love instead of true biblical love.
- Or, let’s focus on feeling better about ourselves! Or perhaps we can turn Christianity, by redefining it, into do-gooder deeds – a place for community service, get involved in the big causes of the day – like picking up trash, or saving the planet, rather than the dispensing of truth to save souls!

Point: There is rather a need to stop playing games, stop redefining Christianity to be compatible with the world, but instead deal with the reality of Scripture – the reality of the spiritual warfare, & come to grips with the good fight of faith!

Point: These saw God high above the tumult of peoples opposition – overruling.

- **Situation** (Vs. 27-28) – so following their recognition of the spiritual battle we are given the immediate situation of which they are praying – it looks very difficult!
- **Vs. 27** – As in exacting fulfillment of Scripture truth – the powers of the earth were gathered against Christ and His people at the crucifixion, are today, and will be at His second coming.

Point: Implied is these forces are far too strong for us – we cannot handle them ourselves, & they could not, nor neither can we! But they & we know something!

- **Vs. 28** – for as he prays this – notice what he adds: “to do whatever...”
 - Who is really in charge of this matter?
 - Who is really working to accomplish precisely what is necessary to be accomplished?
 - This is of course the sovereignty of God – an issue many Christians run from, when they should be running to it – that is what these were doing!
 - These praying apostles & saints had their faith in the reality that God is behind all the opposition – He is working His will in history through every persecution, & they knew He is righteous, & they knew He will make all things right in the end – Christ wins!
 - They also knew this is what faith is all about – this was the exact circumstance our Lord spoke with them about (John 15:18-21 – “for My names sake”; 16:1-4; 33).
 - We are told in the epistles this suffering for Christ sake will continue (2 Tim 3:12). Then we see it in action in (2 Cor. 4:1-2; 7-9) that is the activity & situation of one given to living for Christ, serving Him, speaking His Word.
 - Paul is not complaining – he is stating this as a matter of fact. He would have it no other way – look at (2 Cor. 4:17-18) – you see he understands the calling, the privilege position – he is simply living by faith knowing eternity belongs to the beloved in Christ Jesus. This is why in Acts 16 Paul & Silas were singing hymns in the jail, in stocks – to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake! You see – in reality nothing could be better!
 - Back in our text – these are not asking for escape, but we will see for what they ask!
- **Point:** Sadly most in modern Christianity know nothing of this – they instead are looking for a religion to make the journey easy – most don’t even want to be inconvenienced, not alone persecuted. For shame – be willing “take up your cross...”
- **Substance** (Vs. 29-30) – So what was the substance of their prayer!
 - Lord, this is not fair, take our opposition away, make our path easy! No!
- **Vs. 29** – “take note of their threats” – their threats are against You! When we witness correctly, peoples antagonism is not against us, but against God!
 - They are asking God to be in the circumstances – that is where their comfort is - this is another way of stating Rom. 8:28 “we know God works all ...”.
 - They are not dictating, as many do, what God should do about it – but placing their confidence in God to deal with the situation purposely as only He is able.
 - What is it the apostles are concerned about – what are they asking for? Their faithfulness to the ministry!
 - They want God’s name vindicated & glorified. Their fear was that they might fear & fail – they might miss the opportunity! Is that our fear?
 - Notice -“grant that Your bond servants” – a statement of complete humility – a statement of complete submission to God’s will whatever it may be!
 - What do they want granted? “may speak Your Word with all confidence” – instead of being intimidated, being afraid, compromising to keep from being persecuted – “speak Your Word” – in other words – speak the truth!
- **Vs. 30** – “while You extend...” – there was a short time frame where God used glorious undeniable miracles to prove His presence in the extension of Christ’s work thru the apostles. By rightly dividing the Word we can know that God proved that His hand of work was upon the church by the extension of the same kind of glorious miracles that Christ Himself performed continuing for a season in the earliest time of the founding of the church. By the time of the epistles, we see such miracles have ceased. This purposeful cessation is spoken of by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.
 - It was the miracle of the healed lame man that brought the preaching, & conversion of many, & also the persecution for which they are praying.

Point: The key here is “extend Your hand” – the prayer is from their perspective for God to continue His work among the people – as Christ stated “without Me you can do nothing.” The glory of God, not the needs of men are the highest purpose!

Point: The major miracle that continues to this day is the transformation of life that comes in true conversion – that is their real prayer - saying “through the name of Your servant Jesus.” And, that should be our continual prayer – Lord, please move supernaturally on hearts – seeking & saving that which is lost in Christ’s power!

3. **Supplied power** (Vs.31)

- **Vs. 31** – God was pleased with their focus, with their unity, with their desire – He showed it outwardly by shaking the building.
 - More importantly, he showed it by giving them the boldness they requested.
 - Doesn’t this remind us of the words of (James 4:2) “you do not have because you do not ask.”

Point: These men were not consumed with themselves, their comfort, their immediate well-being, but with the work of God being accomplished – & to carry it out in the same committed manner as if the Lord Jesus was continuing on earth.

- Sadly, this kind of real commitment is very-very rare in the church today.
- One likely reason, even at GBC, we don’t always see God’s obvious work is we are not each of us at this degree of commitment to Christ – a no matter what degree!

Closing:

- Turn to John 4:31-34. It wasn’t wrong for Christ in His humanity to eat – it was important, but Christ was trying to use the opportunity to express a truth. The greater priority, even more than eating, is the work of the ministry. We are ambassador’s for Christ – all of us who claim Him. Is His work, His witness, growth in Him your top priority?
- The church is being formed as an extension of the literal work of Christ on the earth – these men recognized their high / glorious calling – were faithful to the message, & sought the Lord’s power to carry out their commission.
- What a great start! No wonder the message of Christ from a handful of rag-tag men turned the world upside down!
- Now – here we are 2000 years later – where is the church? How far has it wandered away from its calling, from its dependence on God, from its commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Where is GBC? We are a church that seeks to honestly declare the Scripture, thoroughly, unashamedly – but where is our dependence on God, where is our commitment, where is our passion as a church? – prayer is key / essential – when is the last time you asked God for His power, for boldness, for faithfulness!
- And then where are you personally? What are you doing with your life? Are you seeking the Lord prayerfully for your personal faithfulness, for the work of Christ to continue even through you?