

Blessed Are The Persecuted

Acts 4:1-31

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As I mentioned, we find in Acts 4 the first persecution of the Christians. We're going to learn, especially as you contrast Acts 4 with Acts 5, that first there is open opposition and Satan comes in through Ananias and Sapphira a different way. You know, Satan is relentless; and he never stops. If Satan can't get in the front door, then he'll come in the back door. If he can't get in the back door, then he'll come in the side door. If he can't get in the side door, then he'll come through the chimney or whatever means he has. He will not leave the Church alone. He won't leave you alone. We find that these Christians, as Jesus predicted and said would happen, the world would persecute and oppose them. The Bible actually says, "...and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." That's a mark of the true Church, and that's what we begin to see.

I want to outline this chapter for you, if you're taking notes. In verses 1-4, we have the persecution or the persecution as it starts. Follow with me in your Bibles, "And as they spake," so it's a continuation of chapter 3, "unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them," this is not the good laying of hands; this is the bad laying of hands. They weren't laying their hands on them to pray. They were laying their hands on them to arrest them. "...and put them in hold," or in prison, "unto the next day: for it was now eventide," or it was evening. "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

Luke starts in verse 1 and says, "...as they spake unto the people," who is they who spoke to the people? It's speaking about back in Acts 3, Peter and John. Remember Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, approaching what is called Gate Beautiful. There was a man laid at the gate. He was lame and begging for alms. Seeing Peter and John, he fastened his eyes upon them and said, "Can I have some alms?" Peter said, "Look on us... silver and gold have I none," remember that? "...but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up." Dr. Luke, writing in the book of Acts, says "his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." That miracle drew a crowd. When the crowd began to gather because of the miracle, Peter stands up, filled with the Holy Spirit, and now boldly preaches and proclaims his second sermon. Acts 2 was Peter's first sermon, the Pentecostal sermon, and Acts 3 was his second sermon. Tonight we get his third sermon. We see the third time Peter preaches a marvelous sermon as he is under arrest here.

It was Peter and John (verse 1) speaking unto the people. It says, "...the priests, and the captain of the temple," the priests were the Levites. They were in charge of what is going on around the temple. The captain of the temple was actually the temple police. The Romans,

though they had conquered the land of Israel, allowed the Jews to have their own kind of God squad, you might say, their own little temple police. They were in control of what went on in the temple area. The captain of the guard was in charge of the temple police. Notice verse 1, it's very important, "and the Sadducees, came upon them." The first persecution of the first Christians came not from the unbelievers or from the heathen world, it came from the religious world and it has ever been the case. The religious man persecutes the spiritual man. The dead, religious man, the man who has nothing but a form and no true relationship with God, opposes and hates the true believer.

Let me tell you something about the Sadducees. They were those who opposed the early believers more in the book of Acts. In the gospels, the opposition to Jesus came from the Pharisees. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were two sects of the Jews. The difference between the two was the Pharisees were more orthodox. They were more sound biblically. They were devoted to the law and the keeping of the law and were very religious. Their focus was just God and His Word and studying the Scriptures, but the Sadducees were pretty liberal and very materialistic. They were aristocratic but were actually the ones in charge of the priesthood and of the temple. They were very, very, very liberal. They did not believe in the afterlife. Think about that. They didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead or that we would live after we died. That's why jokingly I've said over the years, "They were sad, you see, and so they called them Sadducees." That's a joke, but it's not very funny, right? You're saying, "Pastor Miller, you should've given that up long, long, long ago." I thought that was pretty funny when I first thought about that—they deny the resurrection so they're sad you see, and the fact that we believe in the resurrection, we're glad you see! They were very materialistic, and they were power hungry. They were very liberal. They denied certain orthodox truths of the Scriptures.

The reason why they attack the Christians is because the Christians were preaching the resurrection from the dead. Literally, in the Greek it's "from out among the dead." Jesus came out of the grave from others who were dead. He came back to life. They didn't believe in the resurrection, and so they opposed these Christians because they were teaching not only that Jesus was the Messiah, and they were threatened in their position and their power and their place, but they were also threatened because of their belief system—they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. In verse 2, "Being grieved that they taught," that is, Peter and John, "the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." They didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead, and so the persecution is coming from the Sadducees—this very powerful, very liberal, very aristocratic, very kind of upper crust group of the Jews known as the Sadducees. The opposition came not because of the miracle in chapter 3 but because of the message that they were preaching—Christ rose again from the dead.

"And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold," or in prison, "unto the next day. Howbeit many of them," Luke throws this in verse 4, "which heard," that is, they heard the preaching of Peter, "the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." All the way through this chapter and especially at this point, I want to point out that persecution never ever hinders the Church. The Church grows and flourishes even during a time of persecution. Jesus said, "...I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We don't

want to have persecution. We don't cater to wanting to be persecuted. We don't want people to persecute us, but anytime Satan by the world or what other means religious persecution has tried to hinder the work of God, no way! The Church grows and flourishes. Even now in parts of the world where Christianity is illegal or opposed or there is persecution, it's growing there faster than it is in the United States because we've become complacent. We've become apathetic. They don't have a Wednesday night Bible study. They don't have a World Series baseball game seven to distract them from church. They'll walk for hours to be with other Christians. They'll go to prison. They'll die for reading the Bible. They will risk their lives to gather like we're gathering right now on Wednesday nights, and we take it for granted. We have a kind of a cavalier take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

I believe that sometimes God allows persecution because He wants the Church to grow stronger, and if God allows persecution in the United States (and that day is not far off. There's a subtle form of persecution. Open persecution doesn't happen now, but if it happens) it will only strengthen, refine, and purify the Church. The Church always grows as it's being persecuted. The death of the martyrs has always been said is the seed of the Church. You kill one Christian, and three or four take his place. You kill another, and three, four, or five take their place and the Church is continuing to grow.

Luke puts in this statement, and by the way, this is the last time in the book of Acts where there is ever any mention of the number of Christians. The first number we had was one hundred twenty on the day of Pentecost, then three thousand souls were saved, so three thousand one hundred twenty. Now, there is a reference to five thousand. We don't know whether or not the three thousand one hundred twenty and the five thousand are all combined together to make five thousand or if it's in addition to that, but it's the last time in the book of Acts that we have mention of the number of believers, then the Church was growing. It did start in chapter 2 with one hundred twenty and now they're up to five thousand, and this five thousand may not count women and children.

The persecution, they're thrown into prison by the Sadducees, and then what happens (verses 5-12) is the preaching. First you have the persecution, and it moves into again, then as a result, Peter gets an opportunity to preach. Look at verse 5. "And it came to pass on the morrow," the next day, "that their rulers, and elders, and scribes," then it describes, "And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this," speaking of the healing of the lame man back in chapter 3. "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to this impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." Peter is pointing at the lame man or referring to the man who was made whole. "This is the stone," referring to Jesus Christ, "which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under

heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Verse 5, “And it came to pass on the morrow,” or the next day, that all of the rulers gathered together. It started with the opposition of the Sadducees, they threw them in prison, and the next day they gathered them and bring them into their courtroom. What we have in verse 6 is what is known as the Sanhedrin. I don’t know if you’ve heard that term or are familiar with it, but the word “Sanhedrin” means “the seventy.” Basically, it was the Jewish Supreme Court. There was no other Jewish court higher than the Sanhedrin. They were seventy elders gathered together, the Jewish Supreme Court, and they pull Peter and John in. The cool thing is as a result of this opposition, the persecution is just getting started. It’s going to get a lot more radical. They’re going to start chopping heads off and throwing them in prison and killing Christians. It’s going to also be led by Saul of Tarsus who becomes Paul, but at this point it’s more subtle but gives them an opportunity to speak to the Jewish authorities. They are going to have an audience with the Sanhedrin, and they’re going to be able to preach Christ. That’s what Peter does in this case.

Notice he says that there was Annas the high priest. Annas had been deposed by the Romans as the high priest. At this time he wasn’t technically the high priest because he had been deposed by the Romans, but the Jews still looked at Annas as their ruling high priest, so he’s mentioned here. Then there was Caiaphas who, by the way, Jesus was crucified and tried under Caiaphas. He is the son-in-law of Annas, and he was appointed by the Roman government. He was kind of a puppet high priest. There’s a mention of John and Alexander, and we know nothing about John or Alexander. They were leading Jews of authority and part of the Sanhedrin. They just kind of put their names in there to give credence to the bigwigs that were on the Sanhedrin there to try Peter and John. “...and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest,” so the family of the high priest, “were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst,” Peter and John in the midst of the trial, “they asked,” them what actually was a trick and lead-in question, “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” They knew that if they were to say by Jesus’ power that they could bring against them the accusation of blaspheming or that they were trying to lead the people of Israel away from Jehovah God. They were trying to get to, “Who do you say did this miracle?” Then Peter speaks up.

This is the beginning of Peter’s sermon. Notice it says that he’s “filled with the Holy Ghost.” I want you to mark as we go through Acts, (there will be about seven of them) the places where you find the reference to being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” I’m going to point them out over the next several months, and you’ll see them. The point I want to make is that being filled with the Holy Spirit is something that can be repeated over and over and over and over and over and over again, and the over and over could keep going over and over. All the way back in chapter two, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Now again, they are filled with the Holy Spirit. A little later, we’ll get it at our last verse tonight, verse 31, it says that “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

The point that you need to note is that a person, a Christian, can and should be repeatedly

filled with the Holy Spirit. You don't just get one dose of the Ghost and that will set you for the rest of your life. You have to be filled ongoingly, and this is what Ephesians 5:18 says. It says, "...be filled with the Spirit." In the Greek, that is actually a command. It's not an option. The Bible commands us to be filled with the Spirit. In the Greek it's what's called the passive voice; that is, let the Holy Spirit fill you. In the Greek it's what's called all-inclusive—that means all of you. In the Greek it's in what's called the present tense—that means that you are to continually, ongoingly be filled with the Holy Spirit. How are you filled with the Holy Spirit? You're filled with the Holy Spirit when you surrender to the Holy Spirit and He controls you. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that He controls you. He doesn't take away self-control, He gives you self-control. He fills your heart, your mind, and He controls you.

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost," this is a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, "said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed," now notice he points out, and I believe a little tongue-and-cheek maybe sarcastically, "You have thrown us into prison and you are trying us because a lame man is walking! Think about that. How insane this is." "...done to the impotent man," this is insane. This guy was lame and now he's walking and now we're in trouble? We're thrown into prison and we're being tried? Peter, no doubt, is sarcastically pointing out the inconsistency there. "...by what means he is made whole," Peter says, "I'll tell you." Verse 10, "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth," so he doesn't mince any words. He makes very clear this is Jesus the Messiah, the Nazarene, "...whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead," so he hits on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and he squarely places the blame that you have crucified, "whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." By what power or authority has this man been made whole? By Jesus Christ. Guess what Peter is saying, to their chagrin, they were pretty upset with this idea, but he's actually saying this Jesus was crucified, God raised Him from the dead. They're going, "Well, wait a minute. We don't believe in the resurrection from the dead." You'd better start believing now because He's alive and He made this man well. There was evidence right there before them that Jesus Christ was alive because this man who had been lame is now whole and walking.

Notice also, it was predicted in the Old Testament. He quotes from Psalm 118:22-23 in verse 11. He says, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." That is a quote from the Old Testament book of Psalms, as I said, Psalm 118:22-23. The Jews were building a temple, and they rejected the most important part; that is, the chief cornerstone. Jesus Christ is that cornerstone. It's a prophecy. This is what's called a Messianic Psalm prophetically speaking about Jesus Christ. You've rejected that "stone which was set at nought of you builders," and then he makes an amazing statement that every Christian should underline in their Bible, mark, note, and memorize. He said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." There it is.

We live in a culture today that says, "All paths lead to God." "Anybody that's sincere will get to heaven," and "No one has the right to tell anyone else that your religion is wrong, or what you

believe is not right, or we have the only way to God.” I mean that really, really gets the world upset. When you, as a Christian, say, “Do you know there is only one way to get to heaven and that’s through Jesus?” “You can’t say that! You’re crazy! You Christians are so narrow...only way to God...who do you think you are that you have an edge on knowing how to get to God?” The argument is not with us as believers, the argument is with the Bible! Read it yourself. I don’t even have to interpret it. Peter the apostle is making this statement. He says, “Neither is there salvation in any other.”

Do you know that no one else came from heaven, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life because they were God and man? Jesus was the God man—the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He healed the blind, Himself raised the dead, cleansed the leper, walked on water, calmed the storm, multiplied the fish and the loaves. He did all these miracles, and then He went to the Cross willingly and died for our sins. No one else has done that, no one else. And He was buried...Jesus did another thing that no one else has ever done—He rose from the dead! That’s kind of my, “Put that in your pipe and smoke it,” verse. Buddha didn’t rise from the dead. Confucius didn’t rise from the dead. Mohammad didn’t rise from the dead. If you’re a communist, Lenin didn’t rise from the dead. I’ve been to Moscow Red Square. You can see the remains of Lenin. Thousands and thousands of Russians gather almost every night in Red Square and parade by the grave of Lenin. It’s all past tense—he was the great leader—but when you go by the tomb where Jesus was buried it says, “He is not here. He is risen!” Amen? He’s the only One that has ever risen from the dead, so is there any wonder that there’s no salvation in any other? He says, again, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

What did Jesus say in John 14:6? He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” I mean, how much clearer can you make it? “Jesus is just one of many paths to God. Jesus is just one of many ascended masters. Jesus was just a man on whom the Christ consciousness came, and He had divinity within Him just as you and I have divinity within us, and we can obtain this kind of state of Christ consciousness and Christ awareness,” and all this mumbo jumbo. The Bible teaches that God came near in the Person of Jesus Christ. He was called Immanuel, meaning God is with us. God came down to us. He came for a purpose so that He would die for man’s sin on the Cross, be buried and resurrected again from the dead. I love this fact that Peter at this point says, “...there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Being sincere will not get you to heaven. You can be sincerely wrong. There’s only one path and that’s Jesus Christ.

The story moves in verse 13 to verse 22 into the punishment. Again, it’s just the beginning of persecution so it’s not very fierce, they just threatened and warned them; but notice beginning in verse 13, again it comes from religious sources, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John,” they took note, “These dudes are bold!” “and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.” I love that. “But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a

notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name, 18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.”

It says in verse 13 that “they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men,” and they were blown away by that, “they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” What does that mean? It means that these disciples, by their standards, were not formally educated. When it says that they were unlearned and ignorant, they were anything but unlearned and ignorant. They had spent three years at the feet of Jesus—the Son of God, the Master Teacher. You can’t spend three years hanging out with Jesus and be ignorant and unlearned, right? They knew the Word of God. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They weren’t ignorant and unlearned. They were just uneducated in their higher schools of education. They were basically Galilean hicks. They were Galilean hillbillies. They were despised by these upper echelon, these educated intellectuals who were liberals in Jerusalem. They weren’t of their schools of higher learning, but they had walked with Jesus. They made a mistake when they put it in the past tense—that they had been with Jesus—they had the Lord with them right then and there! Jesus said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Do you know that you’re never alone? Jesus is always with you. Not only does He see you, but He knows your thoughts. You’re never alone. He’s always with you. You can always talk to the Lord at any time of the day or night.

The boldness came (verse 13) because they were filled with the Spirit and educated by their Master, but according to these Sadducees they were laymen. They didn’t go to our seminaries and our higher theological schools of education. Some of the greatest men and women of God, used mightily by God, have not been formally educated. I don’t think there is anything wrong with formal education, but the most important education is that which God gives you by His Spirit through His Word. Do you know that you can open your Bible, study and learn, and you can educate yourself? There is no reason for any Christian today to be ignorant of the Bible other than laziness or apathy. We have so many resources for learning the Bible and growing in our knowledge of God’s Word. Even if you have no formal education, you can study God’s Word and grow in a knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It says that they were “beholding the man,” they’re looking at the apostles and they see this man that was healed standing with them. I love it! It says, “They could say nothing against it.” I mean, your life is a testimony. Did you ever think about that? There might be people that have more intellect than you, certainly a lot of people have more intellect than I do, and they might be able to argue with you. They might be able to challenge you intellectually, but one thing they cannot deny is your changed life—that once I was blind and now I see. Once I was walking in

darkness, now I'm in the light. Once I was enslaved by drugs or alcohol and now I'm set free. Once I was enslaved to sin and certain vices, and now I'm a new creation in Christ! Your changed life is a powerful testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ, and there are people that may be more intellectual than you and may argue with you, but one thing they cannot argue, and that's your changed life. So, if you have an unbelieving family member or friend or co-worker that you're trying to argue into the kingdom of God, just let them see that Jesus is real in your life. Let them see the reality of the change of Christ in you.

They were looking at this man. They're scratching their heads saying, "We don't believe that Jesus is alive, but man, something's happened to this dude! He was lame, and now he's walking." I think the Church needs more lame men standing with them to convince the world. One of the powerful testimonies that Christianity is true is changed lives. Jesus is alive, and He's in the business of changing lives.

It says, "...they had commanded them to go aside," verse 15. They sent them out of the council chambers, and "they conferred among themselves." Question. How did Luke know what they said? Luke wasn't there. It's kind of a little sanctified imagination or a little reading between the white spaces, but some theorize, and of course it's a theory, we can't be sure, that maybe Saul of Tarsus was in the Sanhedrin and that when he got converted, he conveyed that to Luke and Luke had that information; or maybe Nicodemus had that information because Nicodemus had become a believer in Jesus, and he's still a member of the Sanhedrin. We don't really know, but anyway, Luke is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He says that "they conferred among themselves," and this is actually what they said, "What shall we do to these men?" They acknowledged, "that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem," and notice they, "...cannot deny it."

How blind is that? They acknowledged, "This guy was lame, and now he can walk. We don't care about that, we just don't want people preaching Jesus and the resurrection from the dead." Instead of saying, "Wow! This is amazing! We want to know Jesus. We want to follow Him. We want to believe that He's the Messiah." You know, when somebody is really willfully, deliberately wanting to be blind, nothing is going to convince them. Miracles aren't going to convince somebody if their heart is already set to not believe. They reject the truth of Jesus Christ. It's amazing how this evidence is so clear to them. They don't deny it. It's undeniable, yet they still will not believe so they conclude that it go no further among the people. We'll threaten them, Oh yeah! I'm sure that's going to help! and they spoke harshly unto them saying, "We don't want you to preach anymore in this Man's name. So, "they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter," still full of the Holy Spirit, "and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God," you're going to have to decide, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Isn't that awesome?

This is why the Church grew in times of persecution. This is why the Church grew in times of opposition. Peter says, "Look, you're going to have to decide whether or not we're disobeying you or God or what, but we're just going to do what we believe God has called us to do." This is

kind of a break between the Christians, who were still Jewish, and Judaism. It's a break with them and the temple, and they're going to actually end up breaking away eventually from the temple. Basically, they were disobeying the law. They were the authorities. They were giving them a command, No more preaching in Jesus' name, and they say, "Sorry, but we have to speak the things which we have seen and heard."

You know the Bible says that we must obey God rather than men. You know, if they pass laws in the United States that it's illegal to pray, what happens? We break the law. "Oh yeah, but we're supposed to keep the law." Yeah, but when man's laws come into conflict with God's laws, in order to keep man's laws, I must break God's laws? Then we must keep God's laws and break man's law. We have a higher authority. Let me tell you something. In our United States today, that day is not far off. We're getting very, very close. Do you know in some countries right now which we've considered western countries, Christian countries, it's against the law—it's called hate speech—which we're really close right now. It's hate speech for a minister to stand in the pulpit and condemn certain sinful lifestyles. That person can go to prison or go to jail for saying that those things are wrong. That's hate speech. We're not far off in the United States. We're standing for the truth, standing for God's Word, proclaiming the Word of God, speaking the truth in love...there should be no hatred in our hearts for anyone, but preaching the truth of God's Word can bring us into opposition with our governmental authorities. Actually, the Bible says that God has placed them in authority over us, but when man's law contradicts God's law, we must obey God's law. Amen? We must obey God rather than man.

On several different occasions, years ago, I had the opportunity to smuggle Bibles into China, and I do mean smuggle Bibles into China because that was illegal. It was against the law, but God says to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; so we have to be obedient to God. We have to break man's laws to obey God's law. Now, we gotta be careful that we don't disobey God because we want to keep man's laws. It's so very important, and we shouldn't disobey man's laws unless it conflicts and keeps us from obeying God's law. We have to make that clear.

"So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed."

Now, in verses 23-30, we have the prayer, and this is awesome! It says, "And being let go," so, Peter and John are threatened and told they can no longer preach. They are let go from the council and where did they go? They went directly to the believers. "They went to their own company," in times of persecution we need fellowship with other believers, "and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God," so they run to the believers. They gather together in fellowship, and they say, "We need to pray." They got on their knees and began to pray. They said, "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David has said, Why did the heathen rage," he's quoting from Psalm 2, "and the people imagine vain things? 26 The

kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ,” or Messiah, “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. 29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants,” here’s the petition, “that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy,” the King James has “child,” but in the Greek it’s actually “servant,” “Jesus.”

Here’s the prayer, and I want you to notice it. It starts with God’s Person in verses 23-24. It focuses on God. It zeroes in on God. It zeroes in on His sovereign rule, His creative power, and God’s promises and purposes. Notice it. He says, “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and” everything in them. There’s a principle here that is super important. When you pray, get your focus on God and who He is. When you do that, your prayers don’t seem so big. God is bigger than your problems. So many times satan pushes our problems right up in front of our face and we can’t see God because of it. We need to get back and see God. When we pray in times of persecution, the principle is that we first focus on God, and they’re praising God for His sovereign rule.

Unique word, “Lord” there in verse 24. It’s where we get our English word “despot.” It means that you are a ruler, you’re sovereign, and that you’re also the creator. If, God, you can create the heaven and the earth and you can create all these things, then what’s the big deal? What’s the problem of You being able to answer our need and meet our need? So, they focused on God’s sovereignty, being the creator. They also focused on God’s promises, verses 25-26, where he quotes from Psalm 2 and points out that David said, “Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ,” so, God, You promised in Your Word that what happened is totally going to happen; and then God’s purpose—God is in control. “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” In other words, “God, You’re in control. You are sovereign. You created all things. You’re omnipotent and, God, You’re in control. This is part of Your purpose and plan.” We need to trust Him.

They then get to the petition. They move from God’s person to God’s promises to God’s purpose to God’s ways, we submit to, and then God’s petition. The petition is: Give us boldness. Notice they didn’t pray for deliverance, verse 29. That’s what I would pray for. “Lord, help them not to be so mean. Help them to be nice to me. Help them not to hurt me.” No. They prayed, “Lord, give us boldness,” “by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.” They pray for boldness to preach the gospel and that God would follow the preaching with miracles so that it would confirm and attest to the message that they were preaching.

It closes in verse 31. I want you to follow with me, they receive the power. “And when they had

prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Years ago, we were at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa on a Sunday night. Pastor Chuck Smith was preaching, and the church was packed. He came to this verse. I’ll never forget it. He read the verse, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken...,” the minute BOOM he read that verse, there was an earthquake. It was amazing! There was about 1,800 of us in the sanctuary, and he reads that verse and RUMBLE the building shakes! I’ve been praying for the Lord to do that for me for forty years! I think, I must not be as spiritual as Chuck Smith. Everybody just looked around and Chuck just smiled real big and said, “Ah! That’s awesome! God just confirmed His Word.” Can you imagine being in a prayer meeting and this actually happened? The building shook... now I don’t know if it was a large earthquake in the area or if it was just their house shook, but I think it was divine intervention. I think God was shaking their prayer meeting location just to remind them that He heard and that He would answer their prayer. God always answers prayer.

Notice, again, they’re filled with the Holy Spirit. This, again, is a fresh filling. The emphasis today for the believer should not be on a one-time experience. I meet people all the time, “Have you been baptized in the Holy Ghost? It happened to me back in 1928 when I walked down the sawdust trail and I’m full with the Holy Ghost.” “Well, that’s great. What about right now?” “Oh, it was so glorious. Years ago, I got full of the Holy Ghost.” I think some of it done drained out of you, Buckaroo. You need another dose of the Ghost. We need fresh in-fillings. When you get up in the morning say, “Lord, fill me with Your Spirit.” When you’re in the heat of stress in the day on the job, “Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit.” When you come home from work or, ladies, when your husband is just coming home or you’re just getting home from work, “Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit.” When you need to deal with a problem or a problem person or an issue, “Lord, fill me with Your Holy Spirit.” It’s an ongoing appropriation.

They preached and they were persecuted; they prayed and they had power, and then they preached again. That’s the cycle. They preached, and it brought them into opposition and persecution. Then they got on their knees and prayed. They didn’t whine. They didn’t complain. They didn’t run. They didn’t say, “That’s the last time I’m ever going to talk about Jesus.”

I remember when I was a baby Christian, I had an ichthus on my car—my ’66 VW bus that I never should’ve sold, classic—it had this ichthus sticker on it. I remember all my friends gathered together around my car and said, “John, what’s that on your car?” I had just gotten saved, and I stuck that thing on there. They didn’t know I was a Christian, you know. We were partying, and I was just as crazy and as wild they were. Now, there’s a Christian sticker on my car! I knew it was my hour of decision. Am I going to stand for what I believe? Am I going to tell them I’m a Christian or am I going to freak out? I had this fear come over me like, Oh, no! They’re going to know that I’m a Christian. My first thought was, Just tell them somebody stuck it on there! I remember just kind of taking a pause for a moment and I swallowed, “Yes, it’s mine,” my voice kind of cracking. “You’re kidding! You’re not a Christian, are you? Aw! That’s ridiculous!” They all started mocking and laughing at me and putting me down. I remember going away. I was all bummed out like, Ah man, Jesus! Why would You let that happen to me?

I'm not going to read my Bible ever again. They laughed at me. They laughed at my bumper sticker. It was like the ultimate persecution! Isn't it crazy what knocks us off balance? "They didn't invite me to the party! They don't like me. They call me a Jesus freak," or say, "Hey, your halo's crooked. You need to straighten it." All the little snide remarks that you get on the job. Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of Me, I'll be ashamed of you; but if you confess Me before men, I'll confess you before My Father and the holy angels."

All that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Your friends may ostracize you. They may not invite you to the parties. They may not like you. You may have a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a husband or wife, Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword...and a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Now, again, we don't go out of our way to look for this kind of opposition or persecution. We don't want to see a husband and a wife against each other; but if one of you stands for Jesus Christ, it can cause strife and tension. What are you going to do? You have to obey God rather than man. You have to stand for Christ. You have to stand for the truth. That's when years ago I heard that statement. It was actually a man by the name of Kenneth Wuest. He's done a series of New Testament commentaries. He said, "I would rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in the crowd." I love that! You have to make a decision, Am I going to follow the crowd or am I going to follow Jesus Christ?

I notice the confidence of Peter and John being filled with the Holy Spirit, not arrogance but confidence. We should pray and ask God to fill us with the same holy boldness, and the authority in which they spoke because they were preaching God's Word in its truth and the effectiveness of Peter and John—they obeyed God, they prayed, and they kept preaching, and the Church kept growing.

As we go into Acts 5, we're going to see a shift, a more subtle persecution, where Satan now comes into the Church. It's kind of, if you can't beat them, join them, mentality. Remember I said that first Satan comes with open persecution and then comes with subtlety; so he comes through Ananias and Sapphira, and God has to intervene and judge them very, very severely.

The principle that we learned tonight is that we need to stand for Christ no matter who opposes us, no matter who comes against us, no matter who rejects us, no matter who persecutes us; that if we pray, we get our eyes on God no matter what opposition you're facing—get your eyes on Christ. He is sovereign. He is the creator. He has a purpose. He has a plan. He has spoken in His Word. We can trust Him, and we need to obey Him. Amen?