

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Handle Persecution, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 4:1-12

Code: 1714

We come now to the study of the word of God. We'd like to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Acts Chapter 4. As I was coming down the aisle, I heard somebody say how long is going to get through that outline. And I realized when I told the girls in the office that the text was Acts 4:1-37, they almost fell over. We'll not at all cover all those this morning, obviously. Okay, Acts Chapter 4. I've titled this whole chapter really through verse 37, how to handle persecution. And we're going to just begin to dive into a little bit this morning--an initial statement through verse 12.

And persecution, of course, is a very, very intrinsic part of the Christian picture and always has been. And here we have some tremendous truths given to us in the example of the apostles as they handled persecution. Now persecution was a blessing to the apostolic church just as it is a blessing to all churches and all believers. Five times in 11 years hands were stretched forth to persecute the church in Jerusalem on an organized basis. And this chapter records the first of these persecutions and really the beginning of the persecutions of the church that are still going on today, some 2,000 years later.

During the first 300 years of the church's existence or the first three centuries really, there were ten persecutions of major proportions brought against the church. Beginning with Stephen and extending nearly to all of the apostles, death became the common way to go, if you were a Christian. The first persecution, for example, broke out under Nero Domitius, the sixth Emperor of Rome and about the time A.D. 67, which isn't too long after the church began.

And Nero contrived all kinds of punishments for Christians. He sewed some up in the skins of wild animals and then turned hungry dogs loose on them. He used others dressed in wax shirts and attached to trees to be lit as torches in his garden. The next persecution under Domitian was perhaps even more inventive. Christians were imprisoned. They were put on racks, they were seared, they were broiled, they were burned. They went through scourging, stoning, and hanging. Many were lacerated with hot irons. Others thrown on the horns of wild bulls.

In the fourth persecution beginning about 162 A.D., some Christians were made to walk with already wounded feet over thorns, nails, sharp shells. Some were scourged until their flesh was gone. Others were beheaded and so it went. Under the eighth persecution at Utica, 300 Christians were placed alive around a lime kiln and told that they were to make offerings to Jupiter or be pushed in. Unanimously they refused and all 300 of them perished in the lime.

That was only the beginning of what the church has undergone. And Satan's persecution as time has progressed, has become all the more subtle than it was then. It's not nearly as obvious how it is that Satan persecutes today. And incidentally, today apparently much more successfully, Satan's techniques are working. Now our text records for us the first persecution. This is the beginning of the steady stream of persecution that has gone on since the commencement of the church. In one way or another the Christian church is always under persecution. It is not always political. It is sometimes personal. It is sometimes religious. It sometimes comes from illegitimate Christianity. That is the greatest persecutor of evangelical Christianity--is probably liberal Christianity--at least in the American situation. And one way or another then, the church has suffered persecution ever since what we're going to see in Acts Chapter 4 began at all. And as I said, persecution is subtle today. It's not what it used to be. Satan usually directs the persecution today not at the physical body, but at the ego. He directs his persecution at pride or acceptance or status, etc. And it's really very effective.

He doesn't threaten the Christian by saying if you witness, I'll cut your head off. He threatens the Christian by planting within his mind the fact that if you witness you might lose your job or your status or somebody might think you're strange. In these days, persecution has a tremendous effect in a very subtle way. The form of persecution in the early church made heroes out of those who died. And it came to be such a normal thing for Christians to die, that many Christians developed a martyr complex and just went around trying to put themselves into positions where they could be martyred. I mean, they wanted to belong, you know.

But today the persecution that comes is more effective. It doesn't make heroes out of anybody. And it's a sad thing, while the church today is not being killed physically, the church has succumbed to a kind of living spiritual death. I suppose the perfect illustration would be the church at Sardis in Revelation Chapter 3, verse 1, which says "And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write these things saith he which hath the seven spirits of God or the Holy Spirit and the seven stars, the ministers of the seven churches, I know thy works that thou hast to name that thou livest and art dead."

Satan has killed the church in terms of its spiritual effect without ever having to kill the Christians in it. In fact, by letting them all live in an insipid kind of godless Christianity, he has a greater effect than if he wiped them all out and had to face the issue again that the seed of the church is the blood of the martyrs. And so Satan whose persecution in the past has slaughtered Christians physically, has found it much more effective to kill the church by making it complacent, indolent, fat, rich, socially oriented, and accepted. And insipid as its watered down its theology to accommodate the world.

Much more effective than if all Christians were boiled in oil. Now there are some places in our world where persecution does reign, physical persecution. Even some places here in America. But one way or another Satan is antagonistic to the church. He persecutes the church. Obviously and flagrantly

and blatantly, physically or subtly by the persecution to become involved in the world to strip off that which offends in order that you might maintain your prestige, your status or whatever it is that you desire from your ego.

Now Jesus in John Chapter 15 warned the church in the statement to His disciples that they might as well expect persecution. In verse 18 of John 15 we read this, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own." You see that's why, John says, "love not the world." What happens when a Christian falls in love with the system is, the system no longer really is hindered by this guy. They are no longer offended by this guy, and Satan has accomplished a greater persecution than if you had taken that guy and killed him physically, because he has destroyed his effect. In fact, he has made him a negative.

"If you are of the world, the world would love its own, but you're not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." And they'll persecute you. Verse 20, "Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Verse 2 of Chapter 16, "They'll put you out of their synagogues, the time comes when whosoever kills you will think that he does God's service." Religious persecution.

So there is always persecution. Jesus stated it. Peter went on a step further in 1 Peter 2:21 and said this. And this is an important statement. He in effect said we should expect it. "For hereunto were you called because Christ also suffered for us leaving us an example that you should follow His steps." If you confront the world, the world will react violently one way or another. Now you may succumb to the persecution of Satan so that you fiddle out and kind of get laid by the wayside long before you ever confront the world, because you're really doing that to save your ego from being persecuted.

But Paul said to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:12, "You," pardon me, "Ye, and all that live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Now that's a very clear statement. Ye, and all that live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." You say well, you know, I go along and I don't suffer persecution. Read the verse again. "All that live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." If you're not suffering persecution, why aren't you? Because you're not living Godly in Christ Jesus, just that simple.

If you live the kind of life that God intends you to live in Christ, you will by the very nature of that life butt heads with the world and when I say world, I mean the system. If you are not suffering some persecution, you have either fallen right into the flow of the system so that they don't know the difference or they haven't discovered yet who it is that you really are. You've hidden it well. But you begin to live openly and Godly in the world and you're going to bang heads with Satan and with his establishment. You begin to confront the world and the persecution is automatic.

Now, we see this in the early church. First of all, it looks so great. You know, we always say if you really live a Christian life, the world will be drawn to you. Sure they'll be drawn to the beauty of your

person, but as soon as they find out what it is, then all of sudden that which draws them to you, unless they come to Christ turns to be a negative. The early church, for example, in Chapter 2 and 3, everything looked real positive. Chapter 2 the world was amazed at them and they found favor with all the people and everything looked great. And all of a sudden they found out what it was they stood for and everything shifted gears mighty fast.

Now in Chapter 3, you'll remember that Peter had gone with John to the temple and there he had healed the lame man. A crowd had gathered together in the courtyard. Peter and John had stood in Solomon's portico up off the floor, a little bit off the courtyard, and he and John had between them the lame man and Peter began to preach. And he preached a powerful message regarding Jesus as Messiah or the Christ, God. And he indicted Israel for executing Christ. He closed with an invitation to them in verse 19 "repent and be converted." And he really let them have it.

You see he confronted the world. He stood up in the middle of their thing, right smack in their temple where they were doing their religious duties and he said this is wrong, you have blown it, and he confronted them face to face. Now that's the kind of confrontation I'm talking about. That's the kind of confrontation that brings hostility. But that's the kind of confrontation that God expects us to be involved in.

It is not that kind of a mealy mouth hiding in order to protect our ego, our status and our prestige and our name among the world. The response to what Peter did was very interesting. Look at verse 4 of Chapter 4 and we're kind of begin to look at our text. "But many of them who heard the word believed." Now that's what we're trying to affect. We're not trying to hide, because if we hide, not only do we not suffer, but nobody gets saved either. That's the problem. Sure you say well if I do that, I'm liable to get really messed up. That's right. You're liable to get messed up and somebody else is liable to get straightened out. And your life is expendable my friends, so is mine. True?

My life is expendable for the sake of somebody else. As soon as I start trying to live to protect my ego and to protect my status and to protect my prestige, then my life has become self-centered and it's no good to God or to anybody else. If I'm not willing to confront the world for the sake of the salvation of those in the world, then I don't have really anything to offer God or anybody else, and I'm only kidding myself.

Now it says in verse 4 that "many of them who heard the Word believed and the number of the men was about five thousand." Now the word was about should be translated came to be five thousand men. That means this is the total of men at this point, this is the membership role of the church. This is the male volume anyway. And there are two words for men in the Greek, two really most dominate words, anthropon or anthropos and that word has to do with man generically. Man as a race. Then the other one is andros, or here tonandron, plural. This means man as opposed to female. And it would be best translated males. And so what it says is this, "And the number of the men came to be

or the number of the males came to be five thousand." That means in addition to that, they were probably at least another five thousand women and children.

That's a large church for such a fast beginning and you never hear another listing of how many from here on out. It grew so fast from this point that they it got past the possibility of keeping an accurate account. But many believed and that was the reaction. Now that was worth the price that Peter paid. It's always worth the price. To confront the world that God may do His work. If we never confront the world, we blow it because it is to the world that we are sent with the gospel.

You say well, I might lose my job. Praise the Lord, so lose your job, who cares about your job? I mean, God can handle you. He can provide everything you need and promises that He will. Now this doesn't mean you're to be a lousy employee and waste all your time preaching the gospel. You better reread Ephesians. You're to work like you ought to and give an honest day's work for an honest day's earning. But wherever you are in this world, they ought to know that you stand for Jesus Christ.

Now let's look at the text and see two things, the persecution manifests first of all in the first four verses and then the persecution met. And then we'll look at the principles for meeting persecution and just kind of look at a few of them this morning. We don't have much time to look at all of them. And I'm excited about this, because this is going to give you some practical things, some real tools that you can use. First of all, persecution is manifest in the first four verses, verse 1. "And as they spoke," while they were speaking, "unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them."

Now the idea of "came upon them" is with anxiety, anger to arrest them. I mean, they absolutely grabbed them, this is the point. This crowd had been gathered into the temple courtyard. They had seen the miracle and the official people of the temple and Israel were really getting uptight about it and so in the middle of Peter's sermon really it isn't fully the middle because he's already wrapping up with his conclusion, but while he has yet speaking, they arrive at Solomon's portico and they grab them. They "came upon them" it says.

Now I want you to see who's involved in this. It doesn't say oh the robbers and thieves and crooks in town and so forth and so on. It says, number one, the priests who were to represent God, which immediately shows you where the priesthood had gone. Long way from where God intended it. It's interesting too that there were 24 courses of priests in the Levitical order and there were so many priests that they divided them into 24 courses, and of those courses only certain priests ministered every week. So when the priests were ministering in the temple, that meant it was their week. And you waited a long time for your week and when your week finally came, it was a big deal. And least of all, did you want all of this commotion going on during your week that you'd waited so long for?

And so here in the middle of the week of these particular priests, all of this hubbub is going on and they're really concerned. This is religious opposition. And remember as I said earlier, persecution of the church often comes from religious groups. Still even often from Judaism. All right, second person that we meet is the captain of the temple, the Sagon, and this is the head of the temple police. Here is the political opposition. In some parts of the world, there is political opposition against the church.

In China today, there is political opposition against the church. In Russia, there is political opposition. Did you read in the Times the other day about the big hassle in Russia now because so many of the Russian leaders are getting connected with religious groups and now Russia is tremendously concerned to untangle these people who are in important positions in Russia from various religious groups. There are certain places in the world where there is political opposition. And that we get from the captain of the temple who was the head of the temple police.

Now the Roman government was very tolerant, but against disorder publicly they were merciless. And so he wasn't about to get himself in a position where there was a riot or he would really be in trouble. Then we meet the most important group and that is the Sadducees. Now you say what are the Sadducees? Well, within the framework of Israel there were many groups. There were the Pharisees and there were the Zealots and so forth, and one interesting group was the Sadducees. Now we don't really know where that name comes from. Some say from Sadock, but there's really no way to tell.

But Sadducees were a religious and a political group. So they combined the worst of both in their persecution. They were the power sect in Israel. They were the religious liberals. They were the high priestly family. All the high priests at this point were Sadducees. They were the opposition party to the Pharisees, like the Republicans and the Democrats with a religious flavor. They were the opposition.

Now the opposition of the Pharisees dominates the gospels and the opposition of the Sadducees dominates the book of Acts. So both of them get into play. It's also very interesting that they were very wealthy. The Pharisees tended not to be wealthy, they tended to be extremely wealthy. They were also the collaborationist party. They were the ones who were always scratching Rome's back for the mutual scratch, you know. They really didn't care that much about the common people. They only cared about maintaining the status quo and keeping their power and their prestige in Israel. So they maintained a collaborationist attitude with Rome. Kept on friendly terms with Rome in order to maintain their prestige, power, and their comfort.

They were a small group, very minority, but were greatly dominate in the political influence of Israel. They didn't care for anything about religion other than the fact that it was social custom. And so they were strict liberals. They were strict social religionists. In fact, I'll give you just four points of their theology. Won't take more time than that. We'll get into it a little later in the book. But number one, they believed that only the written law was binding. And no...none of the oral tradition. That is none of the rabbinical laws were binding. All of those things that the Pharisees lived and died by.

Secondly, they believed there was no resurrection of the body. There was no future reward. There was no future punishment. Typical liberal line. Thirdly, they believed that the existence of angels and spirits and the spirit world was a myth. Fourthly, they believed that man was the master of his own destiny. That God was not involved in calling the shots. That there was no such thing as sovereignty or predestination, but man mastered his own fate.

So here they are, the religious ranking liberals, the VIPs of Jerusalem, the bluebloods, and they're the ones that come after Peter and John. And the reasons they did it are very clear in verse 2 and I want you to see them. Very clear. "Being grieved that they taught the people and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Now I want you to notice the word grieved. Now that sounds in the King James like oh they were so sorry. They were so sad in their hearts, but that is not what the word means. It is a very strong word and it means they were thoroughly pained. They were in terrible, mental anguish.

It's not the kind of sorrow that oh things are getting all distraught. What a sad day for Israel. It's the kind of anguish that's based on indignation and wrath. That's the word. In fact, it's used again in Acts 16:18 where Paul saw the woman at Philippi under the power of an evil spirit and he had the same kind of attitude. It's an angry indignation. It's not just simple sorrow. Now they were really angry. This is standard bigotry, you see. They really got uptight. They got...they got very disturbed. Very indignant. Very angry. And they had three reasons.

Number one, let's look at verse 2. That "they taught the people." First of all, they were upset that they were teaching, Peter and John. Now you see they believed that they had the corner on all truth. That they had all right to teach and nobody else had a right to open his mouth. I mean, that was all...that was the way it was. Theirs was the prerogative of teaching and nobody else had the right. And least of all to walk right in the temple where all of these teachers were, stand up and teach contrary truth to that truth which they had been teaching.

They were really upset because these two were teaching. Who were they to teach? They're not approved. And interestingly enough, look at verse 13. "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men they marveled." They were unlearned and ignorant. Now that's two interesting words. And you don't get the total impact by just reading those words. Let me show you what it means. Unlearned means that they didn't know the sacred writings and the Jewish law. They weren't versed in Jewish theology. These guys are not even Jewish theologians they said.

They're ignorant of rabbinic law. They haven't been to the proper schools. How can they know anything? You remember they accused Jesus of the same thing. Who is He that's saying all of this? He's never been to our school. Where's He getting His information? And then Jesus answered, I get it

directly from God. Oh, you know, school is a little extraneous.

And secondly, it says not only were they ignorant in terms of Jewish theology, but the second word "ignorant" means that they are commoners. They are not professionals. They are strictly amateurs. Who are these uneducated amateurs? That's exactly what they're saying. And to make it even worse, they were from Galilee which, of course, was the ultimate in despising. And so they had no right to step into the narrow world of the instructors and stand up in the very temple and teach doctrines contrary to their own. And they were mad, because they did not agree with their theology.

Now whenever you stand up in the face of opposition and you proclaim the truth that they deny, you're going to get in trouble. And so they were angry. They had every reason to be from their perspective, because they needed to preserve their own position. So it bugged them that they taught. That they even stood and taught. Secondly, it bugged them what they taught. Look at the first two. They preached Jesus. They preached through Jesus the resurrection, but they were preaching Jesus and that they hated.

They had determined that Jesus was a blasphemer and here they were back announcing all over town that Jesus was Messiah and you all have killed your Messiah. Now that is not real popular stuff. And you try announcing that today in the midst of a congregation of Jewish people and you're going to find some reaction. Peter proclaimed Jesus is Messiah and he indicted the whole nation of Israel for missing the Messiah and he got a reaction. So they didn't like that he taught and they didn't like what he taught.

And thirdly, they didn't like the resurrection idea. He preached through Jesus, the resurrection, from the dead. He kept announcing that Jesus was alive. Well, that's a fearful thought. I mean, if they have executed their Messiah and He's back alive again, that's scary for them. Because what would hinder Him from moving right out to bring about the vengeance that they would justly deserve? And let's be honest enough to think that they knew they were hypocrites. I don't think they covered that up very well.

I'm sure they knew they were hypocrites in their hearts and they probably took a second thought and thought, Well, maybe we did blow it. Maybe we did execute our Messiah. Boy if we did and He's alive again, this is bad news. Better to shut these guys up. Apart from the fact that the Sadducees theology did not permit a resurrection, which irritated them to death. And do they didn't like the fact that they taught and they didn't like the truths that they taught. And so they reacted. Now what were the results in verse 3? "They laid hands on them," and as I say that is not to ordain them. "They laid hands on them and they put them in custody in jail until the next day for it was now eventide." Three hours had gone by, they came here remember about three o'clock in the afternoon for the afternoon prayers. And by this it's at least six o'clock which was eventide. So three hours have gone by and this little incident, and they finally laid hands on them. And I don't know how many of those three hours

Peter spent preaching, but nevertheless, they came to get them and they put them in jail overnight.

Now that was the reaction, so the persecution began. But at the same time, I love verse 4. "Many of them who heard the Word believed and the number of the males came to be five thousand."

Imprisoning the apostles didn't nullify their effect. And it didn't prevent the progress of the gospel, you see. This was the first instance which since has been so often repeated and which persecution has only led to the extension and the establishing of the church rather than destroy it. It has brought it growth. If trial, watch it, and persecution on a personal level is God's way of maturing a Christian, and it is if you read James 1, then trial and persecution on a whole church-wide level is God's way of maturing His whole church and building it up.

Persecution always results in growth. Mark that. That has to be the beginning thing, because that's your commitment to do what's right even if persecution is involved. Persecution results in growth for many reasons. Number one, it strips off all of the dead weight. If you're a part of a group of people that are having to lay their lives on the line for Jesus Christ, then we're only going to have people in that group who are willing to do that, right?

And part of the problem of the church today are all the tares that are sown among the wheat and the easiest way to get rid of the tares is just to make the wheat pay the price...or make the church pay the price of total discipleship and the tares will just drop off because they're not really that committed and don't want to get that involved. And so as a church is persecuted, it is purified. The waste is stripped off, false believers leave, the strong are left and God works freely through them.

So we see persecution manifest and persecution purifies the church and it greater increases its effect to a greater degree. Now let's see how they met this persecution, just the first couple of points in our outline. And here are seven principles for meeting persecution. As I say, the first thing you've got to do is commit yourself to confront the world or you'll never have to run into the problem. Now here are some practical things. These are really practical.

In James Chapter 1, you know, he says, "Count it all joy when you fall into trials and temptations." That's a wonderful opportunity to grow. That's the way you grow is by going through the test you see. If we live Godly in the world, we will suffer persecution. If we suffer persecution, we ought to be happy because persecution will make us grow and it will reach others for Christ and that's what we're all about. True?

But somewhere you've got to make the commitment that you're willing to do that and make your life expendable rather than to hide and protect yourself. So we look forward to persecution with great anxiety and great joy for righteousness sake. Now watch seven principles in reacting to persecution. Number one, be submissive to it. If persecution comes, be submissive. Verse 5, well let's look at verse 3. "And they laid hands on them and put them in custody." Does it say they laid hands on them

and Peter and John hit back and a brawl ensued? Doesn't say that at all. They laid hands on them, and they just put them in jail overnight.

Verse 5, "It came to pass on the next day that their arrest is the morning after they've been in jail all night, rulers and elders and scribes and Annas and Caiaphas and John and Alexander," etc., etc., "when they had set them in the midst, they asked by what power, by what name have you done this." Now you see no resistance in any of this. Now this is more implied than stated, but it's there. There is no resistance at all. Now I'm not talking about a martyr complex that goes in there and says yes, I'll die. You know, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about trust in God. They didn't resist it, because they saw in it God's great opportunity. You see? This is tremendous and I want you to see this. They knew that their arrest was in God's hands. They had been obedient in the proclamation, they would be submissive in the arrest, assuming that since their obedience had brought them to that point that's where God wanted them to be. Do you understand that?

If you're obeying the Lord and you wind up in a mess, you can assume that God ordained the mess. So stick around, there's something that's going to happen in that mess. Now if you get yourself in a mess in disobedience, that's another...that's a horse of a different color. That's a whole different issue. But if you had been obedient and you had been confronting the world and proclaiming Christ and you get into a hassle, just praise God and wait to see what it's all about and be submissive. Don't fight back.

Now look at this, this is so interesting. Verse 5, they were..."It came to pass on the next day the rulers and elders and scribes," they brought them into this...into a counsel really the Sanhedrin. The scribes, the elders, and the rulers, along with the high priests made up the Sanhedrin. And the Sanhedrin was the high ruling counsel of Israel. This is the Supreme Court of the Jews. And even in the Roman times, they had the right to arrest. It had 70 members and then the high priest was ex-officio President, so there were 71. And it included the priests and the scribes, do you remember the scribes were the ones who were the experts in the law? And the elders who were from the people. And then it included in addition to people from priestly family. And they were really a motley bunch to say the least. With this kind of leadership it's no wonder they had their problems.

Verse 6 introduces Annas. And you remember Annas who was the high priest formerly, but had been deposed by the Romans. He was the senior ex-high priest, but he really ran the show. He was the power behind the scenes. In fact, when Jesus was taken in the Garden of Gethsemane, John 18, they immediately took Him to Annas, because Annas was really the power of the whole structure in Israel. He was a Sadducee. Now he had a son-in-law by the name of Caiaphas who was Roman appointed high priest and he was as bad as Annas was. Then it says John and Alexander. Now it's very difficult to know who they are. There's no way to know, but it is interesting that Annas did have five sons. One of his sons named Jonathan. And some of the manuscripts read Jonathan instead of John, so it may have been his son. And some say that Alexander is a form of Eleazer and Eleazer is

a known son of Annas. So perhaps they were two sons of Annas, perhaps we're reading into it, that we just really don't know.

But anyway, they were of the kindred of the high priest. They all gathered at Jerusalem. Now they got together in their counsel and their Sanhedrin and they brought in Peter and John. Now this is a tough pill for them to swallow, because they're still not rid of Jesus, you see. He's still the issue. Verse 7 says, "And when they had set them in the midst," now that's interesting because they usually assembled in the precincts of the temple there was an inner place called the hall of hune stone. And they sat in a semi-circle and they faced the President who sat out here and they always stuck the prisoner in the middle.

So when it says they put them in the midst, that gives you a good idea even of the picture of Peter and John standing here with a semi-circle of the 70 and the President behind them. Now this is so exciting. Do you know what God had just done? God had just given them the wonderful opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrin. This is a good case of Satan overdoing it. Satan does this all the time. He gets himself into real trouble. By persecution he opens avenues that are never opened any other way.

Do you know there was no way that they could have set up an afternoon to present the gospel to the Sanhedrin? There was no way possible to preach to those men except this way. That's why I say in the design of God to submit is the whole key. They submitted and God put them right where He wanted them. It's a fantastic thing. God allows them to carry their testimony to the Sanhedrin itself. What an opportunity. And precisely why we must be submissive in persecution.

In persecution if you've been obeying God and you're persecuted for righteousness sake, then accept it because God has a design in it, you see, that maybe could never be realized in any other way. Our resistance can thwart God's plan if we resist at the point of persecution. There was no other way they could have gotten them. And thus Satan in his opposition overreached himself, and as always God has a way of taking Satan's best efforts and turning them to His glory.

All right, then it says that once they got them in there, they then asked the right question. God set the stage so perfectly. "By what power or by what name have you done this." What a set up. What a question. In fact, it is indicating in the linear tense that they kept on asking them. They kept asking them. Come on now. Come on. Come on, tell us. And it just maybe that Peter was saying well, I don't know if we ought to say anything about. And he just waited until they egged him on and then he said it. That's possible. Not necessarily true.

But anyway, they kept on asking him and they said first of all, by what power? In other words, they may be in contempt in that question. What magic are you using? But the second question by what name has to do with by whose authority. A name represented authority. In whose name do you do that? By whose...who gives you the authority to heal people and to teach the way you do? And so

they asked a simple straightforward question. Just exactly the question that set the stage for Peter to preach.

Now don't you see how their submission at this point is the key to everything. If we submit in persecution, we'll find ourselves in the place that God wants us to be. Listen to what Peter says. In 1 Peter, and Peter was there, so he may have been reflecting on some of these things. 1 Peter 4, verse 12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you as though some strange thing happened to you." I mean, you're confronting the world, you're going to get it. "But rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's suffering that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is evil spoken of on your part He is glorified."

You see in this, this kind of thing God desires to gain glory. And I love verse 19. "Wherefore, let him that suffers according to the will of God commit the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing as unto to a faithful creator." Just say, Hey Lord You got me into this; here I am. You better take care of me. "And God will be glorified in it." You see, if you let this happen, submit to it; then the glory of God is a possibility.

Second principle, in dealing with persecution, be submissive to it. Secondly, be filled with the Spirit, verse 8. "Then Peter," what's the next word, "filled with the Holy Spirit said unto them." Now you see the key to anything in the Christian life is the power of the Holy Spirit, right. And Peter at this point has yielded to the Spirit of God. It's an erroneous passive. It indicates perhaps that he was already ready because he was already filled with the Spirit.

Now we've talked so much about the filling of the Spirit. If you are at all confused about what that doctrine has to say to you, then you can get the tape on Ephesians 5:18 or the one on Acts Chapter 2. The very beginning and we have an explanation of that in there. But let me just say this. Some have thought that the filling of the Spirit is a kind of a trauma or a kind of a mourners' bench experience or a kind of an emotional thing. It is not. The filling of the Spirit is not the result of lengthy prayer. It is not the result of an emotional experience. It is not the result of some kind of a highly exciting spiritual activity.

The Spirit...the filling of the Spirit is simply when a believer walks in obedience to the Word and the Spirit. You see? Peter had already taken the steps to be Spirit filled because he was obedient. He had preached and he had submitted as God had brought the persecution and that was under the control of the Spirit at that point. That's why it's an erroneous passive. It had already been done.

It is simply submission is all it is. It's, here I am; what a wonderful opportunity; I submit to you Spirit. Whatever You want to do through me do it. The Spirit-filled life is just that. It is yielding everything to the full power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Every Christian has within him the Holy Spirit. He is there

to empower us, and as we yield to His power that power is released, and Peter knew there is no way he's going to get victory over this problem unless he was yielded to the Spirit of God.

You say well, if I was there, I probably would have fallen over in fear. Well, that's possible, but instead of falling over in fear, Peter just leaned his whole weight on the Holy Spirit. There's no other way for victory. And folks at this point without the other five steps to victory Peter has already guaranteed victory. Once he had turned this into that kind of thing he had won the victory. Because what? If this experience had caused him to yield to the Spirit of God, then it's a plus. Would you buy that? Anything in my life that causes me to be filled with the Spirit is a good thing. It's a victory is it not?

Step number two, Peter has already got victory, because you know what happened. This persecution came and it drove him closer to the Spirit of God. That's victory. He was filled with the Spirit. And at this point the whole thing had drawn him to the Lord, completely yielded to His will. That is victory. And I'll tell you something, this is what's missing in the church today. This is why the church isn't victorious over it's persecution, because they're not really leaning on the Spirit of God. When somebody comes at you and persecutes you, you get uptight, you run and hide instead of standing firm and yielding to the Spirit and saying, What's your design? I submit to this. You say, you tend to back off. You know, *Whoa!!--see.*

Or if we know there's something offensive about our gospel or offensive about what we believe, we tend to delete it and we talk in little innocuous, religious platitudes, so we don't offend anybody. Because we're afraid instead of boldly saying what we know is right and then yielding to the Spirit of God and watching Him work. We are defeated first of all by the failing to say what we know is the truth even though it offends, because if it doesn't offend, you might as well not say because you need to offend people so you can show them they've got a problem.

But after that, we fall apart in fear and we make sure that we avoid the issue from then on. That's a backwards thing, but when the church is Spirit filled then it is going to be uncomfortable in the world, but it is going to be victorious. Today the church is comfortable. It is not Spirit filled, it is defeated. Peter and John found themselves out of step with the going pattern of belief. They collided hard with it and they didn't run and hide. They stood there. They submitted. They were filled with the Spirit. They were victorious.

You better be out of step with the world. You better be marching to the beat of a different drum. You better be a constant thorn in the side of somebody in the system. You better be violating incessantly the selfish, godless, immoral, materialistic, indulgent society you live so that you do collide with it or you really have no reason to exist. So they were submissive and they were Spirit filled.

And thirdly, this is good. The third principle of victory is boldly they used as an opportunity. This is terrific. Verse 8, "Then Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said unto to them, ye rulers of the people and

elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man by what means he has made well. 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." Which of course sets them at the opposite end from God again and which He does all the time. "Even by Him doth this man stand here before you well."

Boy that is powerful stuff. Here he goes again. Filled with the Spirit, he uses the persecution as an opportunity for a bolder testimony. Instead of getting persecuted and then clamming or falling apart, he just says well, let me tell you what it was that I was saying so that you will really clearly understand it. I said Jesus is Messiah and you crucified Him. And God had to raise Him again from the dead.

Now apparently in this message, which is only 92 Greek words, it embodies all of the apostolic preaching characteristics. It's got it all. The indictment of rejection. The presentation of Jesus as Messiah from an Old Testament text and then a good note about the resurrection. It's all there and it's even got a closing invitation in verse 12. And in verse 9, he says...he starts to preach in verse 8 and verse 9 and he says, "If we this day be examined of the good deed," isn't that interesting?

In other words, he establishes to begin with that there's injustice. Because what is the thing that they've just done? What does he call it there in verse 9? A good deed. He just makes sure they understand that they're doing unjustly. "He establishes the injustice of the persecution by stating that all they had done was a good deed." It certainly would be evil to heal a lame man would it? If you want to know what it's all about, verse 10. "Be it known unto you all," and then he announces, "to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." And you could just see them go, Ugh! You know. "Whom ye crucified," and then the anger begins to seethe, "whom God raised from the dead. Even by Him doth this man stand here before you well."

Now that is boldness friends. I mean, they...he put his head on the block. He put his life on the line. In the very citadel of the enemy he proclaims the living Christ to them who killed Him. Your own Messiah did this, Jesus of Nazareth whom you killed and God raised. And he always puts them at odds with God, because they always they were plugged into God, you see. He constantly does that.

And so even in the presence of the Sanhedrin he doesn't back off at all on the resurrection. He doesn't back off at all on the indictment of Israel for executing Christ. Let me give you a principle. Never, never, never accommodate the gospel by deleting what offends somebody. You need to major on what offends them. That's the point. And so Peter doesn't back off. And they knew they were spiritual hypocrites and the lingering fear that perhaps He was Messiah must have begun to eat inside. And then as if to dig a deeper hole for them, he says this, verse 11 he quotes Psalm 118:22 right out of their own prophecy. Because their question was well, if this is the Messiah, He wouldn't be dead and brought back again. We don't see that. And so he quotes, "This is the stone which was set at not of you builders which has become the head of the corner."

You know your own Psalm 118:22 said there would be a stone to be the cornerstone, but the builders would reject it, but it would be brought back to be the head of the corner. That's a prophecy of the death, resurrection of Messiah. It's right there. You've got it all. Buildings had cornerstones. In fact, they've found some from the original temple or one of the temples I should say that measures 38 feet in length. They would run up to the corners. They were tremendous things.

And one that wasn't perfect would be thrown away because everything else would be imperfect all the way up. The head of a perfect cornerstone. And so the prophecy simply says Jesus will be the cornerstone, but the builders would reject it thinking it imperfect, but God would bring it back and make it the corner. That's exactly what happened with Jesus. They threw it away. That's not our cornerstone. God raised Him from the dead and stuck Him right back in, created a new temple, Ephesians 2:20. The church.

And in Matthew 21:42, our Lord even claimed to be that stone. And in Romans 9:31-33 Paul said He was that stone. And then his invitation comes powerfully in verse 12. "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." People always say well you can get saved a lot of ways. We were in Israel, we went up to Haifa and they've got the Bahaim Temple up there and it has nine doors to God. Muhammadism, Confucianism, Buddhism, every kind of ism there is and that isn't true, there aren't nine doors to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes unto the Father," what, "but by Me." There is no other name. There is no salvation than any other. There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

And Peter is saying in effect people if you don't turn to Jesus you will be damned. There is no other way. People always accuse Christians of being narrow. We're not narrow friends, any more narrow than the word of God. Unfortunately, the word of God is the most narrow book ever written. It's always right and never wrong and anything that contradicts it is wrong.

It is only in His name. They said to them...they said to him, "who healed that man?" And he said, "Jesus did." And he uses the same word for healing the man is used...when it says it made him well. How did you make this...the end of verse 9. "What means he is made well," is the same word as salvation. And so he does a play on words. This man was physically healed by Jesus and you'll never be spiritually healed unless it's by Him. He's the only way. There's no salvation in any other.

The word salvation means deliverance from sin. No other name, no other name. I close with this, very quickly. In February 1959 at the South Pole, 17 men in Operation Deep Freeze Number Four, took their spare time and built a 16 foot square chapel. And on that chapel they put a sign called the Chapel of All Faith. The structure contained an altar over which they had a picture of Jesus, a crucifix, a Star of David, and Lotus Leaf representing Buddha. The inscription on the wall read, "Now it can be

said that the earth turns on the point of faith." And all faiths altar was recently dedicated at a university, it's called an inter-religious center at one of the Midwestern universities.

The altar it revolves. One is for Protestant, one for Catholic, one for Jewish, and then there's one miscellaneous that's adaptable to any religion. That's just exactly what the Bible says is so wrong. It would have been very easy for Peter and John to have mumbled innocuous platitudes about religion and won the smiles of all. And the early church would have been immediately acquitted from the world's hatred by a reasonable broad-minded, downgrading of Jesus Christ.

But not so, not so. This is it. Be submissive, be Spirit-filled and boldly use it as an opportunity to preach the gospel. That's the first three ways to be victorious over persecution. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You this morning for teaching us from Your book the truths You want us to learn. Seal them to our hearts and us to thy use. We'll give You the glory and the praise for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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