

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-14-16 AM NOTES
"COURAGE IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION"
ACTS 4:1-31
6 in Series, "The Spirit, the Church, and the World"

1 Peter 2:21 (NASB) "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

2 Timothy 3:12 (NASB) "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

"Every religion has one basic characteristic. Its followers are trying to reach God, find God, please God through their own efforts. Religions reach up toward God. Christianity is God reaching down to man. Christianity claims that men have not found God, but God has found them."
—Chuck Swindoll

Acts 3:6b (NASB) "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"

I. Opposition Is to Be Expected (vv. 1-7)

II. Opposition Is an Opportunity (vv. 7-31)

A. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit (vv. 8a, 31b)

B. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Confident in the Spirit's Enabling (vv. 8b-13)

John 14:6 (NASB) "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

John 7:15 (NASB) "The Jews then were astonished, saying, 'How has this man become learned, having never been educated?'"

C. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Uncompromising (vv. 14-22)

Acts 1:8b (NASB) "...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Acts 4:19-20 (NIV) "19 But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'"

D. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Pray With and for Boldness (vv. 23-30)

"Accord"—a compound word that has the word for *together* combined with the word for *passion, heat, or glow*.

E. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Expect God to Answer (v. 31)

Genesis 28:16 (NASB) "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.'"

First Baptist Church Powell, TN 02 14 2016 AM
Chapter 6: Courage in The Face of Opposition
Series: The Spirit, the Church, and the World
Acts 4:1-31

Those who savingly know Jesus Christ should never be surprised when opposition arises. The Scriptures make it clear that opposition will come to those who desire to live in obedience to God's Word. 1 Peter 2:21 (NASB): "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." 2 Timothy 3:12 (NASB): "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." The opposition Christians face today may be ISIS threatening to behead those who will not deny Christ, being ridiculed, being passed over for a promotion because of Christian principles you will not violate, or being blasted for believing that Jesus is the only way to true salvation. Oftentimes the greatest source of opposition, and even persecution, for Christians is religion. In one sense, there are only two religions. There is the religion of works, and there is biblical Christianity that says in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB): "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

All other "religions" are based on good works that earn whatever "bliss" that religion sees as the goal of life here. Fritz Ridenour gives a good summary. "Every religion has one basic characteristic. Its followers are trying to find God, reach God, and please God through their own efforts. Religions reach up toward God. Christianity is God reaching down to man. Christianity claims that men have not found God, but God has found them." [Fritz Ridenour quoted in Chuck Swindoll, *The Birth of an Exciting Vision*, page 68]

When man's religion has someone mess with their "system," they are often going to come after them. Remember that it was religious people that had Christ crucified! In Acts 4 we see the beginning of opposition to and even persecution of the church.

Let's look at the context of Acts 4. On the way to the temple grounds at one of the main entrances (called "The Beautiful Gate"), there was a lame man who had been lame from birth. At God's direction and in God's power, Peter and John gave the lame man a command. Acts 3:6b (NASB): "In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" Peter then reached out and took the lame man's hand and lifted him to his feet and by the time he was upright, a genuine miracle had taken place. The atrophied legs were made whole. The muscles and ligaments and joints began to work perfectly! He not only stood to his feet, he began to walk, leap in the air, and praise God. We have seen that as the crowd gathered in the courtyard of the temple, Peter and John did not use the occasion to begin a divine healing service. They didn't ask for people to bring the rest of the lame people in Jerusalem to them; they did what God intended when He performed the miracle – Peter began to preach Jesus to the crowd that gathered.

I. Opposition Is to Be Expected (v 1-7)

The events in these verses took place on the temple grounds where Peter preached after the lame man was healed. It was no surprise that opposition rose quickly. The Jewish officials seemed to be blind to the fact that this poor man who was lame from birth was now walking, and leaping, and praising God. They were only interested in stopping anything that pointed to Jesus and upset their religious traditions. They thought that they had gotten rid of the problem when they crucified Jesus and buried Him. They weren't expecting Him to rise from the dead!

In verse 1 we see who came to try to stop what God was doing. First, there were the priests. These were the priests who carried out the evening sacrifices. They only got to do this on rare occasions, and they were upset that something was getting in the way of their sacrifices that pictured the coming Messiah who had already come!

Second, there was the captain of the temple guard. The temple had its own police force and this man was like the chief of police. He reported only to the Jewish high priest. The main duty of the temple police was keeping order on the temple grounds.

The third group, that rushed onto the temple grounds as Peter was preaching, was the Sadducees. The Sadducees were one of the four sects of Judaism (along with the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Zealots).

The Sadducees were the most influential people in Israel. Most all of the High Priests were Sadducees; most of the Sadducees were also wealthy land owners; the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme court), and politically they were tight with the Roman officials and collaborated with them in their ruling of Israel. Theologically, they would be called the “liberals.” They were rationalists and denied the resurrection of the dead, and basically anything supernatural. That explains why they were so upset with Peter and John. Acts 4:2b (NASB): “. . . they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” The Sadducees hated Jesus because it was their business venture He messed up when He, at two different times, kicked out the money changers and the vendors charging high prices for animals for the people to sacrifice.

When these Jewish leaders arrested the apostles, it was getting late and there were supposed to be no trials at night. This meant that Peter and John were kept in prison overnight. This is the first persecution of the young church, but there were many instances of persecution that would follow. Peter and John offered no resistance when they were arrested. They submitted to the governing authorities because they believed in the sovereignty of God and knew that God knew their circumstances. What effect did the arrest of Peter and John have on the growth of the church? Verse 4 says that the persecution couldn't stop multitudes from being saved – enough that it brought the total number of men who had been saved since Pentecost to 5,000! The next day Peter and John are called before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Annas was not the current high priest but they kept the title (much as our ex-presidents are still called “President”), but he was still the real power behind the scenes. They put Peter and John and the formerly lame man in the center of the semi-circle and began the questioning. The question, “By what power or in what name have you done this?” was asking in whose authority they were doing this. The apostles were ready to give a witness and testimony pointing to the Lord Jesus who was their authority and their power. In baseball language, these persecutors served up a hanging curve ball right over the plate for Peter and John. Even their persecution gave them opportunity to share the Gospel.

Here is the point I want you to get. If you are serious about Christ and the Gospel, you will face opposition that may even rise to the level of persecution. Don't be shocked by it; don't back away from it in fear. See it as an opportunity to put our Savior on display. Can you picture Peter and John going to the High Priest's house and knocking on the door and saying, “Sir, the two of us would like the privilege of standing before the leaders of our nation and the Supreme Court to tell them about Jesus and His power to save.” What chance would they have of doing that? Yet that is exactly what happened.

II. Opposition Is an Opportunity (v 8-31)

One reason that we miss so many opportunities to share the Gospel is that we shy away from possible opposition. Opposition can become a great platform from which the Gospel may go out. What do we do in order to be prepared for opportunities to share including opposition or even persecution?

A. Opposition Is an Opportunity That Calls for Being Filled with the Holy Spirit (v 8a, 31b)

The filling of the Spirit is when the Spirit of Christ is looked to for the power to accomplish everything God has for us to do, when we are permeated with the Spirit (nothing in our lives are held back from Him), and when we yield control to the Holy Spirit as to what we say, think, and do. Before I come to the pulpit, most every time I ask in faith that the Father would fill me with His Spirit that He might control everything I say, permeate all of my life and empower me with the exact words that I should say. We are to always be on call, always be prepared for those opportunities God brings our way. We must constantly be tapped in to the power of God's Spirit. Are you filled with the Spirit right now? Why not? You will miss opportunity after opportunity if you are not empowered by, permeated with and totally yielded to the Holy Spirit.

A. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Confident in the Spirit's Enabling (v 8b-13)

With boldness and confidence provided by the Holy Spirit, Peter jumped right in. You talk about boldness, this is boldness. People who try to be bold apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit usually just come across

as obnoxious. Peter was not confident in his own strength, nor was he confident in his ability to “wow” people with his intellect. He trusted the Holy Spirit to do it for and through him.

In verse 7, the Sanhedrin questioned them about their authority. Peter answers that question here – especially in Acts 4:10a (NASB): “let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of [authority of] Jesus Christ the Nazarene...by this *name* [the authoritative name of Jesus] this man stands here before you in good health.” He had the living, breathing evidence of his authority – the man who was healed after being lame all of his life.

An amazing thing begins to happen. Peter, an uneducated fisherman changes from being the one on trial before this highly educated worldly powerful group and becomes the prosecutor! Look at verse 10, “Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified.” He continues with amazing boldness in Acts 4:11 (NASB): “He is the Stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the chief corner *stone*.” He is quoting their own Scriptures from Psalm 118:22. He confidently tells them that Jesus Christ was the one prophesied by our prophets and when He came, you rejected Him and nailed Him to a cross.

In verse 12, Peter makes a statement that no doubt infuriated these esteemed leaders of Israel and still infuriates people today. Acts 4:12 (NASB): “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” Christianity proclaims an exclusive Christ in an inclusive world. True Christianity proclaims that sincerity does not make an error become truth. It is possible to be sincerely wrong! Because of that we are often accused of being narrow minded, bigoted, and intolerant. While we are to show kindness and respect for those of other religions, we cannot back off from the exclusivity of Christ which is proclaimed clearly in the Scriptures. John 14:6 (NASB): “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’” Peter, being filled with the Spirit, confidently, boldly proclaimed that Jesus is the only way to true salvation.

The Sanhedrin was obviously taken aback by this bold proclamation. They no doubt thought that they could threaten and intimidate these followers of Christ and make them back down and be silent. No way! As they listened to Peter (and it is likely John also spoke) they were reminded of someone. Acts 4:13 (NASB): “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus.” Perhaps it was their boldness, their confidence, their assurance, that brought back to mind the way Jesus taught. The perplexing question was, “How can these uneducated fishermen have such poise, such confidence as they stand before the esteemed Sanhedrin?” The answer they came up with is, “They had been with Jesus.” It was said of Jesus in John 7:15 (NASB): “The Jews then were astonished, saying, ‘How has this man become learned, having never been educated?’”

C. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Be Uncompromising (v 14-22)

The strong defense of Peter and John and the indisputable evidence of the healed man standing before them put the Sanhedrin in an impossible situation. They could not deny the miracle – there he stood! All of Jerusalem knew who he was and now saw him healed. They decided to call what today is called an “executive session” where all but the Sanhedrin had to leave the room. The reason we know what was going on is likely because there was a believer among them or one who would become a believer. We can’t be dogmatic, but it could have been Saul of Tarsus, who after his conversion, was the apostle Paul. There is some evidence that he was a part of the Sanhedrin before his conversion. We see what they discussed and came up with in verses 16-17. In their deliberations, they did not seek the truth; they sought a way to avoid the truth. After their consultation and plan, the Sanhedrin called the disciples and probably the healed man also, and gave them this command: Acts 4:18b (NASB): “...they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

What follows is the first case of civil disobedience in the early church. The Sanhedrin *did* have governmental authority over the apostles (delegated from the Roman Empire). Here is the case where civil disobedience is condoned (and even commanded) in the New Testament. It is when a direct command of the governing authority contradicts a direct command from God. The Sanhedrin said, “Do not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” Jesus Himself said in Acts 1:8b (NASB): “...you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Their response is in Acts 4:19-20

(NIV): “But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’” All the Sanhedrin were left with were threats. They had no answer for the healed man who had been crippled more than forty years who stood before them.

D. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Pray with and for Boldness (v 23-30)

Peter and John knew where to find the people of the church; they knew that they would be praying. In the infancy of the church there was a culture of prayer. Perhaps it was helped by the fact that the church was born during a corporate prayer time as the 120 waited in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now that the persecution had begun, prayer wasn’t their last resort; it was their first response.

Five times in the first five chapters of Acts, it tells us that the church (or those that would become the church) was in one accord (v 24). The word “accord” is the translation of a compound word that has the word for *together* combined with the word for *passion, heat, or glow*. To be of one accord means more than a group of people who get along well without fussing and fighting. It includes that, but it is much more. It is a group of people that have the same passion, the same burning of heart. It is a group of people who share the same passion for God’s glory and the same desire for the advancement of God’s agenda of going into all the world to preach the gospel and make disciples who will be baptized and obey all that He has commanded. Their heart burns for that and they are willing to sacrifice anything that it might happen. Oh how I long for that!

In the last part of verse 24, the church begins to put their complete focus on God. When they focused on God it brought their problems with the Sanhedrin down to size! The Sanhedrin was powerful, but God is all powerful; the Sanhedrin could make threats, but they could not do one single thing that God did not allow. There is calmness in their prayer because they are trusting completely in the sovereignty of God. They focus first on His power in creation. He made everything that is. The Greek word for *Lord* is not the most common one. It means the one with absolute authority (*despota*). The Sanhedrin had authority, but the Lord has authority over every earthly authority.

Next, they began praying Scripture. The quote in verses 25-26 is from Psalm 2:1-2. They took comfort that all they had seen and experienced was planned and even prophesied by God. They had observed the nations rage, the people plotting, and they had watched the rulers gathered against the Messiah. They took comfort in the fact that the cross was not an accident, but had been planned and determined by God from eternity past. They trusted in the God who can, as Acts 4:28 (NASB) says, “do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.” Reject any view of the cross that has man acting and God reacting. Jesus had never been more in control that He was on the cross. The cross was in the plan of God before man ever sinned in the garden. It was not an accident; it was inevitable.

Nowhere in this prayer do they pray to escape persecution or uncomfortable circumstances. They care only for the glory of God and the agenda of God. Our prayers are often so self-centered and wimpy. Analyze your prayers and requests for prayer; do they focus on your comfort and deliverance from painful circumstances or do they focus on the glory and agenda of God? What did they pray for? They prayed for boldness and power to accomplish God’s agenda. They prayed not for prosperity, for wealth, for possessions, for comfort – they prayed for boldness to speak God’s Word for which most of them were eventually imprisoned, tortured or killed. Really, they were asking God for more of what had gotten them in trouble in the first place! Our prayers are often insipid and powerless because we hijack prayer for self-centered purposes.

E. Opposition Is an Opportunity to Expect God to Answer (v 31)

It is as if God said “Amen” to their prayer with an earthquake! I believe that there was a literal shaking, but the shaking demonstrated God’s manifest presence among them. This was God affirming that He heard and was answering their prayer. God here chose to manifest His presence.

Conclusion

I am praying for this church that we will be men and women of courage. I am praying that we are not surprised by opposition and perhaps even by persecution. We are no better than the millions around the world that are facing persecution for their bold faith. May we not shrink back as cowards.