

## Acts 4:1-22

### “Zero Tolerance”

How many of you realize that whenever God blesses, Satan shows up? His agenda never changes; oppose the work, silence the witness. Jesus said of him, *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.”*<sup>1</sup> & There are times when he will show himself in all his obviously evil nature. But more than not he transforms himself into an angel of light. He’s subtle & deceitful (a liar; which is an indigenous resource of his, the bible declares him [Jn 8:44] the “father of lies”).

What that means (w/in the realm of our context) is that often times it’s the most religious people who are God’s greatest adversaries. You can just expect it in many cases, but that can’t stop you. Why? **Because the most important thing isn’t our comfort or freedom from opposition, but the preaching of the gospel & the glorifying of the Lord J.C. It’s not worry-free ministry we seek, but the glory of God...**

If you recall, we labeled Ch 3 as a “for instance” kind of chapter. Back in Ch 2, Luke told us that many wonders & signs were done through the apostles (Vs 43). Ch 3 gave us a “for instance”. A specific wonder, a specific sign that the Holy Spirit highlighted for us. **Not only for the purpose of seeing the power & authority of the name of J.C. of Nazareth at work in a miraculous way that afforded Peter another opportunity to preach the gospel & the resurrection of Jesus. But also, so that we might see the exact moment that the church began to experience the pressures of persecution.**

The persecution of the church began w/in a few months of the death/resurrection of Jesus & hasn’t stopped (in some form or fashion) since. Oh, it’s not too bad in this country (at least for now, though the pressure continues to escalate) but people all over this planet are (to this day) being forced to pay w/their lives simply because they believe *in, follow after & love J.C.*

(Which to me is simply one more evidence of the reality of the validity of all that Jesus said, did & is. No one is put to death if they believe in Buddha, wanna follow Hinduism? Go ahead. Prefer Islam? That’s your choice. Proclaim the name of Jesus & you become the scourge of the earth, the reason for everyone’s problems, someone of which the world believes they’d be better off w/out. Why do you think that is? Because Satan is a liar, a murderer from the beginning who came to steal, kill & to destroy... I digress.)

Peter had performed a miracle in the name of J.C. of Nazareth, a lame man who’d been begging at the temple was made to walk.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 10:10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He used it as a platform to preach the gospel & encourage the people present on Solomon's porch to repent. That their sins be blotted out, that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord, that they be spared the judgment of God & be turned away (every one of them) from their iniquities.

### Vs 1-4

You can sort of see the scene in your mind's eye, can't you? There they are preaching repentance to the people, exhorting them to believe on the Lord J.C. that they might be saved, & we read that "as they spoke", (they were still exhorting & encouraging the people when evidently) the religious leaders present in the crowd said, "Enough of this!" Or something to that effect & the guard stopped them, seized them & took them away.

That's what this phrase, "came upon them" in Vs 1 indicates. A sudden cease & desist order that was immediately enforced by temple security. Why? Why the sudden seizure of the apostles & the hostile kind of rapid response of temple security? **We see it right here in Vs 2. They were, (the words are) "greatly disturbed (#1) that they taught the people" (these guys weren't in anyway sanctioned or endorsed [accredited] by any theological or rabbinical school in Jerusalem) & #2 "they preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."**

They were preaching that Jesus was alive, that He'd risen from the dead & that through repentance toward God & faith toward Christ that *their* sins would be blotted out & that in Him death would have no power over them. As Jesus said, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"**<sup>2</sup> Of course He wasn't seeking to infer that whoever believes in Him would never die physically, but spiritually. He was pointing to the fact of life together forever in the presence of God, salvation. Freedom from the power & penalty of sin & death.

Now; why did that bother them? Well, there was a couple of reasons (not the least of which was the fact that they'd just crucified Jesus 2-3 months prior to this) but what's highlighted for us here is that the primary sect that the apostles were being examined by wasn't the Pharisees, but the Sadducees. Why does that matter?

Because the Sadducees were the religious materialists of the day. They didn't give credence to any scripture outside the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of Moses & they didn't believe in angels, spirits, *miracles* or *any life* beyond the here & now.

<sup>2</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [In 11:25-26]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

They rejected the notion of the resurrection altogether. So what was being preached was a direct assault (as far as they were concerned) to everything they believed, promoted, proclaimed & lived by.

We might say that they were arrested on the basis of doctrinal suspicion. Listen, you live in an incredibly blessed country. For as messed up (in many ways) as our culture is, the grace of God has *abounded* to the United States of America. Many people who haven't traveled much or seen other countries & cultures don't always understand that. But I can just tell you that 1<sup>st</sup> amendment rights aren't extended to every country & every culture. You can be arrested & put to death for saying something (& definitely for propagating, proclaiming & promoting something that the political powers that be don't care for). There's no such thing as "religious freedom" or even "freedom of speech" in many places in this world.

The Sadducees (quite frankly) didn't like what they were hearing & so they had Peter & John arrested. & I'm sure it was pretty intimidating, arrested suddenly, treated roughly (laid hands on them), threats made against them (as we'll see) & thrown into jail. This whole scene was meant to shake them up, they were sending them the message, "We're the ones in control here. If you're allowed to preach, it's because *we've* allowed it... We can have you arrested & imprisoned any time we feel like it."

But we're also given a little insight here into the fact that pressure & persecution never slows or stops the growth of the church. You can't stop God. In Acts Ch 2 we read that the # of believers were about 3,000. After this event it swelled to around 5,000 (men, probably 10-15,000 including women & children). Enemies oppose, but the kingdom of God continues to increase.

### Vs 5-7

It's a scene of intimidation & interrogation. This is the high council, the supreme court of Israel. 71 members making up the Sanhedrin, essentially the same group of men who just a # of weeks ago had examined & executed Jesus. & Here they are w/Peter & John set before them & the idea is that they have the power to do the same thing to them. (BTW it's completely possible that Paul [on the pre-side of being Paul when he was Saul] was present here, listening to all of this Acts 26:10).

& Here comes the official inquiry, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" It's 2 different ways of asking the same thing, when you act in someone's name, you act in their power, on behalf of their authority.

& Truth be told, they're well w/in their rights to inquire. These guys were the guardians of the Jewish faith; they *should be concerned* w/what's being taught on the temple mount. However, intimidation, pressure, power plays & the way they handle the information they discover as the result of their investigation were radically off base & wrong.

The law (Duet 13) had made provision for just this kind of thing. If a miracle was performed, you were to test the one who performed it, examine them, hear their message. It's not the miracle itself that verifies a work of God, but the message that accommodates it. Is the person who's performed the miracle leading us to worship the God of the bible, are they pointing us to scripture, or in some other direction? It's not the miracle that validates God working, it's the message.

Remember when Moses went into the courts of Pharaoh & performed miracles, then the Pharaoh's magicians would do many of the same things. But they had 2 different messages, were pointing in 2 different directions. What direction would Peter & John point? That's essentially what they're seeking to find out here.

The problem of course is that these religious leaders didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Even though Jesus plainly stated that He was, (He said things like, "Before Ab was, I AM" [I AM being the ancient name for God when Moses encountered Him at the burning bush]). He told the religious leaders, "...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."<sup>3</sup> In the Greek the word "He" isn't there. He's saying, "If you don't believe that 'I AM' (I'm God, the One Moses spoke w/at the burning bush), then you'll die in your sins." He performed miracles prophesied of the Messiah & His message was the fulfillment & proclamation of scripture.

So these guys are on solid ground asking the apostles by what name they were doing what they were doing, they just had a problem where & to Whom they pointed people, notice.

**Vs 8-12**

Wow... What an incredible witness Peter becomes to these men who had ill intentions at best & hostile intentions at worst toward himself & John. Imagine being set before the supreme court, tv cameras rolling, you're on trial & the judge says to you (knowing that the group already has a predisposition against you) "By what authority do you presume to do the things you're doing?"

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<sup>3</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Jn 8:24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& I don't know, maybe Peter was a little bit nervous initially, but as soon as the courtroom silenced, he was filled w/the Spirit of God & began to speak boldly the word of God & the gospel of J.C.! This was an opportunity of a lifetime! You have the exclusive attention of the most powerful people in your nation & you can tell them anything you want. What do you do?

Peter pours it on. He experiences that which Jesus had promised. Jesus said, *"Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."*<sup>4</sup> Now let's take note of the context of this statement. Jesus wasn't saying, "Don't ever study, never be prepared to speak or give a message, the Holy Spirit will show you what to say when you need to say it." **Some people subscribe to that (& it's obvious when they give a message). Jesus was saying, "When you're on trial, when you're called to the carpet for serving Me, I'm going to take care of it."** This really has nothing to do w/the day to day on-goings in a believer's life or teaching the public assembly. It has to do w/finding yourself in legal trouble, simply because you serve the Lord. God will give you the words to say when it's needed.

But I want to draw your attention to what we might call a couple of essential aspects of being a good witness. #1 Is found in Vs 8, "Then Peter, *filled w/the Holy Spirit*", this is a fresh filling of God's Spirit giving him a supernatural boldness to speak directly to the heart of the matter. **Being filled w/God's Spirit isn't something that happens like "one & done". Nor does it have anything to do w/salvation. You repent of your sin, turn to & trust in the Lord J.C. you're saved... But if I'm to receive the power Jesus promised, to be the witness He's called me to be. I need to be filled fresh w/His Spirit day after day after day. I ask God to fill me fresh w/His Spirit all the time.**

Paul told the Eph, *"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,"*<sup>5</sup> & We don't have time to go into it, suffice it to say he was contrasting drunkenness & being filled w/the Spirit, not comparing them. But the command was to be being constantly filled w/God's Spirit.

So #1 We need to be filled w/the Spirit of God. #2 Is found in Vs 11, We need a good working knowledge of the *Word of God*. Yes, the Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance what needs said, but it has to be there to remember, make sense? Let's spend time in the word...

<sup>4</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 12:11-12]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Eph 5:18-19]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Peter begins w/incredibly sound logic, “Gentlemen, are we really on trial today for a good deed done to a helpless man?” “If you’re really inquiring as to what means this man was made whole, then let it be known to *you* (I envision him lifting his voice at this point) & *to all the people of Israel*, that by the name of J.C. of Nazareth (whom *you* crucified, whom *God* raised from the dead), by Him, this man stands here before you whole.” (Your judgment of Jesus was to execute Him; God vetoed your decision & raised Him from the dead showing Him to be the chief cornerstone [our Savior] rejected by you builders).

Let’s not forget; they crucified Jesus a few weeks ago & thought they were through w/this Prophet from Nazareth. Now, these guys are telling everyone He’s alive! & The fact that they don’t even believe in the resurrection almost makes this a declaration of war!

“You rejected Jesus (just as the psalms foretold) but God accepted & exalted Jesus, raising Him from the dead!”

The image of “the stone” wasn’t unfamiliar to these guys, they were O.T. scholars (believe you me). Many, many places throughout the O.T. the “rock” is used as a symbol of God. In the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of Moses, in the prophets & of course the psalms which Peter quotes here.

Peter goes on to say, “Not only is Jesus the chief cornerstone which establishes our foundation, He’s also our *salvation* (Vs 12, read).

Guys, you understand what Peter’s saying here right? He’s not saying that Jesus is a way to be saved. He’s saying that Jesus is the way to be saved & there is no other! You don’t get to heaven being a good person, or through following a religious protocol, through believing in some other philosophy or ideology. But *exclusively* through Jesus! This is a “zero tolerance” statement of fact, there are no exceptions.

Now this rubs against most Americans, most people in general want to lay claim to having done something to save themselves & not have to call upon, humble themselves, or ask help from anyone. But the bible says, “No” if you’re going to be saved you’re going to have get right w/God & the only way to do that is through J.C. Salvation is *needed* by all (we must be saved), it’s *offered* to all, it’s supplied by One.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”<sup>6</sup> Zero tolerance, exclusivity. He said, I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved,”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 14:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 10:9]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



As Paul told Timothy, **"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,"**<sup>8</sup> There is no alternative way to salvation. We can't go through a ceremony of sorts, pray enough, go to church enough, resolve to do better, there's no other way. There's only 1 who has paid for our sins, therefore there's only 1 way to heaven. "That seems so narrow minded, it's not very tolerant of others who may be sincere."

Listen, you understand that truth by nature (by definition really) is intolerant, don't you?" Your 3<sup>rd</sup> grader comes home, shows you his math paper & it says, 100%! You're so elated until you look at it & you see,  $2+2=5$ ,  $3+5=12$ ,  $10-4=3$  & every answer is wrong. You go see the teacher, "Hey my child's paper says 100% but it's all wrong; what are you doing here?" "Well, I didn't want to seem so narrow, or be intolerant of his sincere effort so I went ahead & told him it was right." "But it's not! He'll never learn this way, He'll be living w/me the rest of his life!" 😊 It's time to change schools or fire the teacher, right! Why, because truth is intolerant, it's either correct or it's not.

**God loves you. & Because He desires to see you saved, He's truthful with you. There is no salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved... Let's be grateful that He's clear about it.**

### **Vs 13**

These men were blown away at how bold Peter & John were, Galileans. They weren't trained in the Rabbinical schools of Jerusalem, they were just blue collar works. But let's not be confused, they were highly trained & incredibly educated having spent 3 yrs under the direct tutelage of J.C. They knew the *word* of God & were filled w/the *Spirit* of God.

**Formal education neither qualifies nor disqualifies a man in his service to God. The main thing is that we've been w/Jesus. Being molded & made more like Him.**

**BTW. Isn't it interesting that these men didn't make any attempt to disprove the resurrection of Jesus? If it were possible, they could've proved it right then, presented the body & destroyed this new movement. But they couldn't...**

### **Vs 14**

What can you say? This man who's been at the gate for years (every day for decades) whom you've probably given alms to yourself is now standing there perfectly whole! You can't call it a scam, you can't say, "Well, we didn't see it so we can't verify it." There he is, standing right there!

<sup>8</sup> [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [1 Ti 2:5-6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### Vs 15-18

What's wrong w/this picture? They're being confronted w/a miracle & a message that points them to their Messiah, but rather than humble themselves & shine the light on what's happened, they harden themselves & try to squelch it. They acknowledge the miracle, but don't submit to God.

The conversation they should've had was, "Guys, we can't deny the miracle, it was done through the power of J.C. of Nazareth, we crucified Him, it's obvious He's alive & at work through these men's lives. We need to shine the light on this, humble ourselves, repent of our sin & declare Jesus as the Christ! But there was none of that, they weren't about to incriminate themselves so they decide to try & shut *them* up rather than turn from *their* sin..."

How many people have you heard say something to the effect of, "If I saw a miracle, then I'd believe"? That's not true. It's not a problem of the mind, but of the heart, the heart is desperately wicked. Unbelief doesn't stem from a lack of facts; it's the condition of the heart.

But check it out, they couldn't deny a changed life. It's one of the most irrefutable undeniable proofs of Jesus at work today. You were like "this" & everyone knew it, but you've been changed, you stand up right, you're not the man, not the woman you used to be. What can they say, there's no denying that! Let people see Jesus in you.

### Vs 19-20

"You tell me, religious authorities. Should I listen to man, or to God?" He's saying, "I can't do what's safe, or what's easy, or what's popular... I've got to do what's right. We're not making stuff up. We're only reporting what we've seen & heard as eyewitnesses."

### Vs 21-22

They didn't fear God; they feared man. It was public opinion that moved them. The fear of man is a snare. You can be a man pleaser or a God pleaser, but you can't do both.

It was a situation that could've gone much worse, but in the end 2,000 more men came to believe on Jesus, Peter was filled w/the Spirit, he preached Jesus to the leaders of the nation, the miracle was affirmed & God was glorified.

Listen, when it comes to the message of the gospel, there is zero tolerance. But that doesn't mean there's zero kindness, or compassion or love. Be clear but be loving. People won't care how much we know, till they know how much we care...



**Prayer Points:**

God, thank You that You have loved us & given J.C. that He might lay down His life for us. Fill us w/Your Spirit that we might speak clearly, boldly & in love, for truly the fruit of Your Spirit, is love. Place a passion in our hearts for Your Word & be glorified in our lives.

God loves you enough to be honest with you. Only 1 has paid the penalty of your sin, therefore there's only 1 way to the Father & that's through J.C. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved.