

# The Opposition

## Ընդդիմութիւն

### Acts 4:1-31

This morning I will move on to Acts Chapter four. I would like to just quickly summarize the events of Chapter three.

Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer, when they **saw a man who was lame from birth**. He was a **beggar** asking for money. Peter and John looked straight at him, and Peter said, **“Look at us!”**

-I don't know about you, but when I see a homeless person at the traffic light, I avoid looking to their faces. My heart breaks for their condition, and I don't believe giving money will help them. But I try to avoid looking to their faces.

Peter sked him to look up and said,

**“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”**

The man was healed. And after this event, Peter gave his second sermon centered on the risen Christ.

Chapter four will bring opposition.

**The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. <sup>2</sup>They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup>They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. (Acts 4:1-3 NIV11)**

**The Sadducees** were the ruling class of wealthy aristocrats.

**Politically**, they were with the Romans, and collaborated with them. So the apostles' teachings were problematic because the Romans approved the killing of Jesus.

**Theologically**, they believed that the messianic age had begun in the Maccabean revolt; so they were not looking for a Messiah. They also denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which the apostles proclaimed in Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

**The result?**

**<sup>4</sup> But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand. (Acts 4:4 NIV11)**

Who can stop the Spirit of the Lord; we have here another 5000 converts.

This was not good news for the people who were in power. NO, no, no.

You can put them jail them, but you cannot put the message “in jail” ...

**<sup>5</sup> The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family. <sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?” (5-7)**

**Wow, the next day Peter and John were taken to Israel’s supreme court.**

Guys, this is big. Who do we have here?

I don’t know who **John** and **Alexander** are, but the other two names: **Annas**, the senior ex-high priest who had privately examined Jesus, and his son-in-law **Caiaphas**, is the current high priest who was responsible for Jesus’ execution.

The next day the rulers of the **Sanhedrin**, which consisted of 71 members, presided over by the **High Priest**, including both the elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

The question: **by what power or what name you do this?**

**<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them:**

**“Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. (8-10)**

A short sermon, a testimony, or a good observation and explanation.

“We showed kindness to this lame man, and he is healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was crucified by you guys. God raised this messiah, what do you want more than this?”

**Bold not rude.** Again, the **risen Christ is in the center...**

The Spirit-filled Peter is talking. In fact, God is talking through his mouth.

Let me encourage you my congregation. When you are in difficult places and you want to answer tough questions, remember those two verses:

**But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. <sup>15</sup> For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. (Luke 21:14-15 NIV11)**

**Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. (Mark 13:11 NIV11)**

This does not mean you cannot prepare, or we will become robots. No, God gave us minds to use. But we are HIS ambassadors. He will provide... God will. I have seen this in my life often.

-Then Peter opens his mouth one more time:

**<sup>11</sup> Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ <sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (11-12)**

When you know the truth, you are bold to say it without fear, but again without being rude.

Again, we see Peter uses Psalm 118:22. His audience knows exactly what he is talking about. **This is one of the earliest messianic testimonies.** It was so used (by implication) by Jesus himself, as conclusion of the parable of the vineyard. (Mark 12:10-11) <sup>3</sup>

Jesus said: **I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, No one comes to the Father except through me.** (John 14) (bellow NT Wright Quote)

**The Supreme Court is confused.**

<sup>13</sup> When they saw the **courage of Peter and John** and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were **astonished** and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> But since they could see the **man who had been healed** standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. <sup>15</sup> So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then discussed together. <sup>16</sup> **“What are we going to do with these men?”** they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have **performed a notable sign**, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.” (13-17)

How come ordinary men talk like this?

They are **astonished**. They are confused. They don't know what to do. They know about the cripple- beggar man, and everyone has seen him healed. Everyone in Jerusalem has seen this.

**Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it**

-How sad is this picture. These people of power saw the healing of this man. They heard the message as well. They are discussing in **closed doors** the reality of Jesus Christ. They are rejecting the message of Jesus. How sad is this, which happens nowadays as well.

**<sup>18</sup> Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: **to listen to you, or to him?** You be the judges! <sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."** (18-20)

**"Which is right in God's eyes: **to listen to you, or to him?** You be the judges!** I see here again a wise answer by asking rhetorical question, a polite question and not an attack.

**Where is our loyalty?**

**"To you or to HIM?"**

Peter in his letter wrote:

**Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Peter 3:13-16 NIV11)**

Do you see how important our behavior is; how should we approach people who do not agree with our faith.

The fruit of the HS is love, and self-discipline. We need to remind ourselves often, often, often...

**<sup>21</sup> After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people **were praising God** for what had**

**happened. <sup>22</sup> For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old. (21-22)**

They could not punish them. Did Paul and John throw rotten eggs on them?  
**No, they were praising God.**

**They went back to their “own people”, they continue prayer and praise, quoting from Psalm 2. The place was shaken in prayer... (23-31)**

### **Application:**

#### **1. Am I afraid to be bold?**

Once the theologian Thomas Aquinas visited the Vatican. The building was so beautiful and rich. The Pope said to him: “no longer do we say, ‘silver and gold have we none.’” Thomas looked at the Pope and said, “Maybe that is why we can no longer say, ‘Rise up and walk.’”<sup>4</sup>

There is nothing wrong to have a beautiful church. The point is where is the emphasis of our preaching? Am I being a Christ-centered person to be effective to reach out to the upside-down world who needs Jesus desperately. There are so many ‘crippled’ people around us. The church cannot stay silent.

#### **2. Our loyalty is first to God, then to the authorities.**

We need to be careful with this statement. People cheat on their taxes saying, I don’t like how my government spends the money.

You are allowed only to not obey your authorities if they ban you to worship and pray to your God. Daniel, and his friends did not obey the king.

Vartan Mamigonian did not obey the neighboring Persian authority when they asked the Armenians to deny their faith.

Example from Marash Armenian believers <sup>5</sup>

### **Prayer**

God, when I am weak, you are strong. When I am lonely, you are my comforter. When I feel unable to keep moving forward, you give me the strength that I need to preserve. Please remind me when I feel overwhelmed that you are with me. Refresh my soul and give me rest. In Jesus name, Amen

Here is my prayer based on Paul’s prayer to the church of Ephesians

**<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray**

**that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**  
(Ephesians 3;14-19 NIV11)

1. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts, The Spirit, the Church & the World*, P 95
2. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts, The Spirit, the Church & the World*, P 96
3. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; NICNT P 93
4. R.C. Sproul, *You Will be My Witnesses to the End of the Earth*, Acts. P 54

#### 4. Marash, 1908. Revival in early 1900's

One day all twenty-seven of us were taken from the detention center to Kanli Prison. As we walked out together, we felt like sheep being led to the slaughter. Immediately police and soldiers surrounded us. We were mocked at by everyone watching us. Finally, we arrived at the prison. Suddenly the iron gates flung open, and we were thrown in. While entering the prison, the police commissar took our Bibles and hymnbooks, yelling,

“If your Jesus is able, let him save you from my clutches!”

The scene inside shocked us. We were surrounded by approximately 450 criminals and long-term offenders. They mocked us,

“Look, here come the 'Roohjular' (the spiritual ones), about whom we have been hearing so much!”

All of us innocent young people found ourselves in a terrible imprisonment. This was a land of the shadow, an arena of sin and guilt, profanity, vulgarity and total confusion. In brief, this was a place that resembled hell. We felt like Daniel in the lions' den.

The very first evening the prison authorities separated our whole group from each other and assigned us in one's or in two's to cells already filled with hardened criminals. The cells were very small. I was in a cell with fifteen others. The widest space I could squeeze in to rest my weary body at night was no more than half a square meter, and that at the feet of other prisoners. These guys ordered me not to move so I wouldn't disturb them.

11 months later they were released by a miracle.

N.T. Wright:

If you dethrone Jesus, you enthrone something, or someone, else instead. The belief that “all religions are really the same” sounds nice and democratic — though the study of religions quickly shows that it isn’t true. What you are really saying if you claim that they’re all the same is that none of them are more than distant echoes, distorted images, of reality. You’re saying that ‘reality’, God, ‘the divine’, is remote and unknowable, and that neither Jesus nor Buddha nor Moses nor Krishna gives us direct access to it. They all provide *a* way towards the foothills of the mountain, not *the* way to the summit.<sup>5</sup>

5. N.T. Wright John For Everyone (book2), P 59