

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 4 as we continue our study through the Word of God. As we saw in our last study back in Acts chapter 3, Peter and John go to the Temple for evening prayer, about 3 pm. And when they get there they meet a man who was born lame. This man was brought to the gate Beautiful to beg for alms. He could not get there on his own and for years relatives, friends, carried him to this spot.

And this man, seeing Peter and John asks them for money. But Peter looks at this man and tells this man to look at him and says, “... **‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’**” Acts 3:6. And then he lifts this man to his feet!

At this point this man who never walked in his entire life, for over forty years, is jumping and leaping and praising God. And, of course, that drew the attention of the people and they wanted to know how this man who was born lame now walks?

And Peter, standing there, tells them that Jesus has healed this man, the Jesus who was raised from the dead. The Jesus who wants to extend to you the forgiveness of sins. The Jesus who is coming back, has done this!

Now, as we are going to see tonight, the words Peter spoke are going to rub some people the wrong way because it is going to go against what they believe.

Persecution was coming, and the disciples of Jesus were warned by Jesus that this was coming and has come, and we even see it today. In John 15:18-20 Jesus told His disciples, **“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. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”**

And, as we will see, that will come to pass. It is good to be aware of what is going on, the warning that the Lord has given to us about the days we are living in, so we are not taken by surprise! And persecution for our faith is something that should not surprise us, but, tragically, many times it does.

Listen to these words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as he wrote them from his cell in Flossenbergr, put there by the Germans for his faith and was eventually martyred for his faith. He wrote,

Suffering . . . is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master. . . . Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those “who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel’s sake.” . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 100-101

Again, for many Christians today they are surprised when persecution comes their way, but they should not be. Paul put it like this in II Timothy 3:12, “**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**”

Notice that it does not say, “all who are obnoxious will suffer persecution.” If you are obnoxious with your faith it may bring much difficulty, but it is not honoring the Lord. It is as we live out our faith, live in a godly manner, in a way that honors God, which means it is opposed to the way the world lives, you ***WILL*** suffer persecution!

So, keep that in mind as we go through our study this evening, how we are to live out our faith so that people can see that our faith is real.

Also, keep in mind that this is the same day that this lame man was healed, sometime after 3 pm.

With that as our background, let’s begin reading in Acts chapter 4, beginning in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

ACTS 4

VERSES 1-3

So, as Peter and John are sharing Jesus in the area of Solomon’s porch, (Acts 3:11), we see some of the Jewish religious leaders shutting them down. In fact, Boice says that the emphasis in the original indicates that they stopped and seized Peter and John ***suddenly***. “They must have said, ‘Enough of this,’ grabbed them, and taken them away.” (Boice)

Now the captain of the Temple was responsible for maintaining order on the Temple Mount area. Along with them were the Sadducees, from which Annas and Caiaphas were from. This was the largest of the Jewish religious sects.

And the Sadducees were the liberals and materialists of their day. Why were they so upset with Peter and John? To understand why you have to understand what they believed in or didn't believe in.

The Sadducees did not believe in angels, miracles or in the resurrection. The Sadducees were loyal to the Roman government. The Sadducees also were the aristocrats of society. They were wealthy, and they very much liked to maintain that lifestyle. And the Sadducees only accepted the Pentateuch or the first five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy as the Word of God.

Thus, they see Peter and John speaking of the resurrection of Jesus and they arrest these guys because they don't believe in the resurrection! They saw this miracle in the name of Jesus and they did not believe in miracles. They saw what they were doing as something that might get them in trouble with Rome and thus, they may lose their status in society. So, they came against those who were speaking of Jesus, Peter and John and they were arrested!

Now think about this for a minute. The Sadducees were the liberals of their day and isn't it interesting that the first to persecute the church are the religious liberals! Folks, things have not changed much, for it is the religious liberals that attack the church today!

Now this article is about someone who is not religious, but you will get the idea how irrational his thinking is when you see what the Christians were doing and how he is putting them down because they are living what they say they believe. We are told,

Liberalism seems to have an irrational animus [attitude] against Christianity. Consider [this story] . . . highlighted in the last week by conservative Christian blogger Rod Dreher.

Item 1: In a widely discussed essay in *Slate*, author Brian Palmer writes about the prevalence of missionary doctors and nurses in Africa and their crucial role in treating those suffering from Ebola. Palmer tries to be fair-minded, but he nonetheless expresses “ambivalence,” “suspicion,” and “visceral discomfort” about the fact that these men and women are motivated to make “long-term commitments to address the health problems of poor Africans,” to “risk their lives,” and to accept poor compensation (and sometimes none at all) because of their Christian faith.

The question is why he considers this a problem.

Palmer mentions a lack of data and an absence of regulatory oversight. But he’s honest enough to admit that these aren’t the real reasons for his concern. The real reason is that he doesn’t believe that missionaries are capable “of separating their religious work from their medical work,” even when they vow not to proselytize their patients. And that, in his view, is unacceptable - apparently because he’s an atheist and religion creeps him out. As he puts it, rather wanly [weakly], “It’s great that these people are doing God’s work, but do they have to talk about Him so much?”

That overriding distaste for religion leads Palmer to propose a radical corollary [outcome] to the classical liberal ideal of a separation between church and state — one that goes far beyond politics, narrowly construed. Palmer thinks it’s necessary to uphold a separation of “religion and health care.”

- <http://theweek.com/articles/443225/why-many-liberals-despise-christianity>

Isn't that interesting. He wants them to separate their faith and what they are doing, but for us Christians, that is impossible. At least it should not happen. Our faith is what drives us in what we do, and we have to share what we believe.

And have you been around people who go to church, look like they are Christian, but then you try to talk with them about Jesus, you pray over your meal, and they get angry at you and don't want to hear it. That makes no sense.

And the battle that Peter and John were up against is no different than what we are fighting today, religious liberalism that denies all that Jesus claimed to be and did except what fits their liberal agenda!

For Peter and John, they were arrested for speaking the truth, and since it was evening, this case would be settled in the morning.

Now that is interesting to me because these religious leaders tried to look so spiritual and yet, what they were doing went against what they said they believed. What do I mean by that? Very simple, in the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4.1, we are told, "Judgments about money may be commenced in the day and concluded in the night, but judgments about life must be begun in the day and concluded in the day." (cited in Williams)

That is what religion will do, bring judgments on others while what you do ends up being wrong.

Now, in spite of these religious leaders shutting down the work of God, look at what God was doing!

VERSE 4

Now the church has grown from 3,000 back in Acts chapter 2 to now over 5,000 men! In those days they did not count the women and children and that means that the church could have been between 8 to 10 thousand people!

And as you read this you may be wondering how this happened! Was it by speaking in tongues? *NO!* Was it by miracles? *NO!* Was it by some program that they adopted? *NO!* Was it by an awesome worship team with smoke and lights? *NO!* And we can put all kinds of worldly things in there and I will tell you this, it was not how this church grew!

Then how did it grow? It was as the Word of God was spoken and their hearts were pierced, and they turned to Jesus!

May we not forget that, God's Word is living and powerful and is able to transform lives. It is as Paul said in Romans 10:17, "**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**"

And yes, Satan will use persecution to try and stop the church, but that does not work. What ends up happening is that through persecution the church is strengthened. And so we see Satan infiltrate the church and he is destroying it!

Now, in the Western world, Christians rarely face persecution. Satan instead has attacked us with worldliness, selfish pride, a need for acceptance, and status, as he has infiltrated the church, as I have said. The martyr can impress unbelievers with his courage and faith; the self-centered, compromising Christian is despised by the world.

Now Peter is going to get a chance to share his faith and this time, with the religious leaders. Listen to the question and then the answer that Peter gives these religious leaders. He does not hold back and neither should we!

VERSES 5-7

Picture what is going on here because as you look at these men, this was a scene of power and intimidation. In fact, this same group of leaders had recently condemned Jesus to death, and they wanted them to know that they had the power to do the same thing to Peter and John. Talk about intimidation!

We see these religious leaders, Caiaphas, who was the High Priest, and Annas, his father-in-law who was the power behind the scene and was still referred to as the High Priest just like former Presidents still retain that title.

Here we see not only the Sadducees but the rest of the religious leaders and they all wanted to know who gave them the power to heal this man? That is funny, they should have been rejoicing, but they weren't!

Let's face it, they did have the power to guard against false teaching from coming into the faith. Back in Deuteronomy 13:1-3 we are told, **“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ - which you have not known - ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”**

And yes, they did have the authority to put someone to death if this person or persons were leading people away from the true and living God. They were to check things out according to the Word of God, to see if what the person was saying was true or not and where it was leading people.

But that is not what they were doing here.

And as Peter speaks I want you to see the boldness of Peter. The one who could not acknowledge that he even knew the Lord is now going to speak boldly about the Lord as he is empowered by the Holy Spirit! Listen to how Peter answers this question.

VERSES 8-12

Think about the situation Peter was in and yet, he speaks forth this bold witness of Jesus as he is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The fear, the intimidation is gone, and he is shining for Jesus as he witnesses of Him.

Here in verse 8 this word, “**filled**” translates a Greek verb tense that indicates it was at that very moment that Peter became filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now wait a minute. I thought Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered with the Holy Spirit back in Acts 2:4 along with the other disciples? Here’s the thing. This empowering was not a one-time event, it was something that God kept doing in their lives and we will see that as we read through the book of Acts.

Now, in regard to how people respond many times to what we are saying about Jesus, Boice made this interesting observation. He wrote, “Oh, how the world hates such statements! If you want to be laughed at, scorned, hated, even persecuted, testify to the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ.” How true that is, but don’t let that sway you or stop you from sharing your faith!

As you read through these verses you can clearly see that Peter does not try to win friends and influence people, but he boldly lays it all on the line. Peter is basically asking them why they were arrested, why they are on trial if the only thing against them was the healing of this lame man, something these religious leaders were powerless to do anything about as they saw this man over and over begging at the gate Beautiful!

But, since they did put them on trial and they did ask by what power, what name, what authority this healing was done, Peter tells them!

I love when people ask me a question about God, about the Bible and then I answer their question and they get mad at me. Why? Because I didn't tell them what they wanted to hear! And we will see that with these religious leaders.

And like I have said, Peter doesn't water anything down; he just tells it like it is. This man was healed by Jesus Christ, the One the religious leaders put to death and the One that God raised from the dead!

And then Peter gives them Scriptural evidence that Jesus is the Messiah as Peter quotes from Psalm 118, a Messianic Psalm.

The builders were the religious leaders who were to build the people up in the faith but instead were driving the people from God as they rejected all that Jesus is, God incarnate who came to save us from our sins!

Thus, the One they rejected is the corner stone of our faith, the supporting structure of our faith and without Him our faith will crumble!

Now, today, one of the things we hear is that all roads lead to God, that you just have to believe in something. That is foolishness.

In fact, Peter tells us that this is a false concept; it is not what the Scriptures teach. It is only through Jesus that we can be saved. Now, you can either receive it or reject it, but it doesn't change the truth of the matter!

Peter tells them, and us, that there is no salvation apart from Jesus, *NONE!* Remember what Jesus said in John 14:6, “**. . . ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’**” Why is that so hard for people to understand? Because they reject what Jesus said!

In I John 4:14-16 we are told, “**And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.**”

And Paul tells us in II Timothy 1:8-10, “**Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**”

Salvation only comes through Jesus Christ – there is no other way! And Peter is not ashamed to speak forth the Gospel message and neither should we!

But like so many today, they choose to believe that all roads lead to God! One writer put it like this. He wrote, “The exclusivism of Christianity goes against the grain of our religiously pluralistic society. A chapel built at the North Pole in February 1959 by the men of Operation Deep Freeze 4 typifies the prevalent attitude today toward religious belief. The structure contained an altar, over which was hung a picture of Jesus, a crucifix, a star of David, and a lotus leaf (Representing the Buddha). On the wall of the chapel was an inscription that read “Now it can be said that the earth turns on the point of faith.”

“Christians preach an exclusive Christ in an inclusive age. Because of that, we are often accused of being narrow-minded, even intolerant. Many paths, it is said, lead to the top of the mountain of religious enlightenment. How dare we insist that ours is the only one? In reality, however, there are only two religious paths: the broad way of works salvation leading to destruction, and the narrow way of faith in the only Savior leading to eternal life (Matt. 7:13–14). Religious people are on either one or the other. Sadly, the Sanhedrin and all who followed them were on the broad road to hell.” How true that is!

VERSE 13

As these religious men looked at Peter and John they came to two misconceptions about these men.

First of all, they thought they were uneducated and untrained men. Why? Why did these religious men see Peter and John as uneducated and untrained men?

Because they did not attend Old Rabbi University, they didn’t have the schooling, the training like these religious men did.

But that was wrong. They had spent some three years with Jesus and they did know the Scriptures. But, again, they did not have the religious degree after their name and they were fishermen from Galilee!

Also, it says that “**they had been with Jesus.**” That was not true, it was not some past event but a present reality. Jesus was with them!

I think that is important for us as well. That we are men and women of the Scriptures and that we don’t live in the past with Jesus but in the present with Him!

I realize that people today struggle with this same issue. They wonder how I could be a pastor without a theology degree or something along those lines, and the answer is simple –

JESUS!

Keep in mind that Jesus takes broken, lame lives and stands them up and sends them out to do the work. You don’t need a degree, you need Jesus!

It is as II Chronicles 16:9 says, “**For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. . .**”

Where is your heart?

VERSES 14-18

First of all, we need to understand that this council or the Sanhedrin was a religious council made up of 71 men including the High Priest, and they were powerful.

And now this dilemma that was before them. They had this man who was born lame and was lame for over 40 years and now he was healed. He was standing before them.

And because this miracle was before them they are trying to decide what to do with Peter and John. Their concern is this Jesus thing is going to get out of control and more will believe them, the words they speak of Jesus.

So, they threatened them severely, warning of sever persecution if they continued to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

What is also interesting is that they could not deny the resurrection, even though they tried. The eyewitness testimony of the resurrection of Jesus was too strong.

One writer, F. F. Bruce points out that fact as he tells us, “It is particularly striking that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion . . . did the Sanhedrin take any serious action to disprove the apostles’ central affirmation – the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!”

So, what did they do? Simple, when you don’t have a place to stand, you threaten those that believe these things and that is exactly what we see here.

So, with this threat against them, what do Peter and John do? Let’s read on and see and as you will see, this will set the stage for what we must do in our own lives, but some have taken this to the wrong conclusion as we shall see.

VERSES 19-20

Now, is this a call for civil disobedience? I don’t see it that way. I see them saying that they will speak of Jesus, but they are not protesting, rioting, causing all kinds of turmoil. They are just sharing the love of Christ with people!

Peter and John are basically saying, “We must listen to God and even if you threaten us we will be faithful to what the Lord has told us. You don’t want us to speak and God has told us to speak. So, we will obey the Lord and not let the fear of men stop us! We must speak of Jesus!”

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

Peter Cartwright was a great circuit-riding Methodist preacher in Illinois. An uncompromising man, he had come north from Tennessee because of his opposition to slavery. One Sunday morning when he was scheduled to preach, his deacons told him that President Andrew Jackson was in the congregation. Knowing Cartwright was used to saying whatever he felt God wanted him to say, regardless of how people might react, they warned him not to say anything that would offend the chief executive. He stood up to preach and said, “I understand President Andrew Jackson is here. I have been requested to be guarded in my remarks. Andrew Jackson will go to Hell if he does not repent.” The audience was shocked. They wondered how the President would respond to this, but after the service he told Cartwright, “Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world.”

This is how the early church too responded to opposition – with beautiful integrity.

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – The Church Afire, p. 64

And please understand that they were not just being obnoxious. All this was done in the power of the Holy Spirit that came upon them and that is what is needed in the church today. Not more programs, but an empowering of God’s Spirit upon our lives.

Now I do need to deal with something because some take this to the wrong conclusion. They see this as a call to civil disobedience, to fight against our government. And that is not what is being spoken of here.

Paul makes it very clear in Romans 13:1-7 where he tells us, **“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”**

No protesting, no fighting but honoring those who are in charge over us until they tell us to do something that goes against what God has said.

Also, listen to what Peter tells us in I Peter 2:13-17, **“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men - as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as Bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.”**

Again, the only time we can go against those in authority, our government for example, is when they tell us to do something or not do something that goes against what God has said.

For example, if the government tells you that you must have an abortion, following God overrules this government command.

Also, if they tell you that you can no longer share Jesus. It is not that we are disrespectful to those in authority over us, mocking them, putting them down but we do the will of God over the will of man.

Now we do need to realize that there will be consequences to those actions, like Peter and John found out. But how can you stop speaking of Jesus if He is the way, the truth and the life? You can't as Jeremiah found out as he went through some very difficult times.

In Jeremiah 20:7-11 we are told, **“O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; Everyone mocks me. For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, ‘Violence and plunder!’ Because the word of the LORD was made to me A reproach and a derision daily. Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not. For I heard many mocking: ‘Fear on every side!’ ‘Report,’ they say, ‘and we will report it!’ All my acquaintances watched for my stumbling, saying, ‘Perhaps he can be induced; Then we will prevail against him, And we will take our revenge on him.’ But the LORD is with me as a mighty, awesome one. Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail. They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper. Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten.”**

Not easy but God will strengthen you and you will accomplish what He sent you to do.

One other point and that is at our job, our work place. We are not being paid to share Jesus with people at work. If they ask questions we can answer them. You live out your faith in how you work and let people see Jesus in you and that will open a door for you to share. I realize that is hard for some to hear but that is the reality. Your boss pays you to work and after work, you can share the Gospel all you want.

VERSES 21-22

Again, this is a sad picture of these Jewish religious leaders. Here was a man who was lame from birth and now he is over forty years old. And now he is walking, jumping, leaping and praising God and so are the people, except for these religious leaders because Jesus did not fit in with their theology!

It is not about our theology, it is what God has said in His Word – ***PERIOD!*** And they could not accept that. These Jewish religious leaders who had all the power, could do nothing about what Peter and John said because they feared the people.

You see, the people realized that this man who was lame for over 40 years and now walks is a miracle of God, something that these religious leaders could do nothing about, and the people were praising God.

So, to stop Peter and John, keeping them in prison, would have been a problem for their position, the people would come against them.

Here's the thing. As you stand up for God, stand up for righteousness, only God knows what will happen, what will come your way. But don't let that stop you from standing, from sharing your faith.

Peter put it this way in I Peter 3:13-17, **“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”**

May we be able to give an answer to people about the hope that is in us, that Jesus has come to save us from our sins having paid in full the penalty for our sins!

VERSES 23-24

Peter and John, after they are released, don’t go to the bar to unwind. They don’t go to their therapist for an emergency session. But they go to **“their own companions”** or other believers.

What a great lesson for us, they come together to share what has happened and then they give it to God in prayer.

And notice they didn’t write a letter to their local representative telling them how they were treated unfairly. They didn’t protest. They didn’t boycott anything. They brought it to God in prayer and because they were submitted to God they were in *UNITY* with each other!

And notice that they acknowledge the greatness of God. How important that is because it is easy to lose perspective of the situation. Remember when Jeremiah was discouraged because the situation he was in was overwhelming to him.

And in Jeremiah 32:27 we see the Lord give Jeremiah these words to correct his perspective of the situation. The Lord said, **“Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?”**

I think if you start with that perspective, that God is God and there is nothing too hard for Him, then everything else will fall into place. The situation that we saw as overwhelming is nothing to God. He created the heavens and the earth. He named the trillions upon trillions of stars. He knows everything. Thus, he can handle my problem, that really is not the issue.

The issue is, can I give it to Him and rest in Him? Perspective changes everything!

And we might not always understand what God is doing, but we need to trust in Him. Let me give you this true story and you will see what I mean.

This is from the Weekend News Today, March 25, 2003: “I heard a first-hand story (by a soldier) that was crying out to the Lord to stop a torrential rain storm the day before they crossed over into Iraq. The Lord chose not to stop the rains for many hours. Finally the next morning it was sunny and they began to cross a field. In this field, right before their eyes, were thousands of ‘little silver circles’. The rain that the soldier had tried to pray-away the day before was used by God to uncover a mine-field. We often do not know what God may have in His plans.”

Thus, may we trust in Him and what He is doing!

One more point here and that is the word used for **“Lord.”** It is the Greek word DESPOTES and it is used only five other times in the New Testament. It is a word used for a slave owner or ruler whose power cannot be questioned. In other words, they saw the Lord in total control of the situation and there was no need to question what He was doing, He is God! I like that, now may I walk by faith and trust in Him!

VERSES 25-28

Keep in mind that this is flowing from what Peter just said, **“Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them.”**

Now Peter goes to the Word of God and says that all that has happened is according to your Word. One-thousand years ago, Peter is saying, through the prophet David, the Lord spoke and said that the nations would rebel against God and His people and now it is coming to pass.

What does it all mean? Very simply, that because of the perspective that they had, in the light of God’s Word, that the wrath of man never operated outside of God’s control. And that brought them peace knowing that God has them in His hand and He will see them through this time!

Again, the key is our perspective, that God is in control and because of that we can have peace as we rest in Him and His Word. It is as Isaiah 26:3 says, **“You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.”** There is truly a peace when you learn to trust in God!

VERSES 29-30

I find these words, this prayer very interesting. Think about being in their situation and what would you be praying for. And then look again at what they prayed for.

First of all, look at what they didn’t pray for. They did not pray for comfort, fewer threats, less persecution. That is what we would probably pray for, but not these believers!

Their prayer was that through these times they would have a boldness to speak forth the Word of God and point people to Jesus.

Again, as the church does not warn its people about persecution but rather everything is good, we tend to look for the easy way out. Our mindset is that if things go easy, if there are no problems, then God is in it and if it is difficult it is not of God! That is not always the case and what we need to do is pray for a boldness to speak forth the Word of God in spite of the difficulties that may come our way.

Again, it is as Jesus said in Acts 1:8, **“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”** And that power they were praying for, that boldness we will see poured out in the next verse.

VERSE 31

Now some look at the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a onetime event. But it is not as we see here.

They prayed for that powerful boldness and God gave it to them as they asked.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke - not in tongues - but the Word of God. Never forget that the purpose of the empowering of the Spirit is not that we might speak in tongues. The purpose of the power of the Spirit is that we might be bold witnesses (Acts 1:8).

And that word **“boldness”** is PARRESIA in the Greek and it speaks of “telling it all.” They didn’t hold back!

Don’t hide the truths of God, but speak it forth in love and if you lack that powerful boldness, just ask for God to fill you once again!

VERSES 32-35

Remember the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

And then His prayer in John 17:20-23 for us as He said, **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”**

That is what we see manifested here in the lives of these believers. They had unity that was based in Christ and thus, their selfishness did not get in the way, but it was crucified. When we see disunity, conflict it is because of *SELF*. And that is not a good thing, it is not what Jesus was praying for.

He wants us to manifest His love so that people will know that we are Christians. He wants us to be one as He and the Father are one. And yet, feelings, self, gets in the way and we can use all kinds of spiritual jargon to justify our actions, but are we bringing unity to the situation or disunity by our actions, by our words?

Boice put it like this in regard to unity, because, today we see unity as just accept what everyone says or believes. That is not what is being spoken of here. Boice put it like this, “This unity is not conformity, where everybody is exactly alike. It is not organizational, where everyone must be forced into the same denomination. The worst times in the history of the church have been when everyone has been part of one large organization. It is not that kind of a unity.”

How true that is. You see, when we crucify the flesh, when we surrender to the Lord, others will be more important to us.

Also, F. E. Marsh puts these verses into a perspective for the church today in a somewhat sarcastic way. This is what he wrote,

One has said, in contrasting the early Church with the Christianity of today, “is it not a solemn thought, that if the evangelist Luke were describing modern instead of primitive Christianity, he would have to vary the phraseology of Acts 4:32-35 somewhat as follows: . . . ‘And the multitude of them that professed were of hard heart and stony soul, and everyone said that all the things which he possessed were his own: and they had all things in the fashion. And with great power gave they witness to the attractions of this world, and great selfishness was upon them all. And there were many among them that lacked love, for as many as were possessors of lands bought more, and sometimes gave a small part thereof for a public good, so their names were heralded in the newspapers, and distribution of praise was made to everyone according as he desired.’”

- F. E. Marsh

Again, when people look at our lives, what do they see? They should see the joy of the Lord and the unity of believers coming together to give glory to God. I have seen this bad witness of some who church hop, moving here and there, and their unsaved family wonder why? That is a great question! They are never satisfied because, I don't care where you go, you will eventually be offended by someone or something.

And, what happens is self gets in the way and they move here, and they move there, and they will never be satisfied until they crucify the flesh and surrender to the Lord!

Also, did you see where their focus was at? It was not on some program or some teacher or some this or some that. It was focused upon, built upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ! Look at Acts 4:33 again.

“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.” With unity and the Gospel message going forth there are great blessings that come upon our lives and the life of the church. That is what we see here!

May we not give empty messages but give the Gospel message, *“He is risen, won't you come and see!”*

Now, as we look at Acts 4:34-35, where they sold their homes, lands and **“laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need”** there seems to be some confusion to what this is all about.

Please understand that this is not an early form of communism as some like to say. Keep in mind that communism is not koinonia! In fact, one writer put it like this, “Communism says, ‘What is yours is mine; I'll take it.’ *Koinonia* says, ‘What is mine is yours, I'll share it.’” (LaSor)

But doesn't it say that everyone sold the property they had and gave their money to the apostles to distribute? No, that is not what is being spoken here. "The Greek here does not mean that everyone sold their property at once. Rather, from time to time this was done as the Lord brought needs to their attention." (Horton)

And think about it. The early church was meeting house to house, (Acts 2:46), that means that they had homes where people gathered together.

Then what is going on here? I believe that this is speaking of other property that they had and when there was a need, they would sell it and give it to the apostles to be distributed!

Ryrie makes that point as he wrote, "This is not 'Christian communism.' The sale of property was quite voluntary (v. 34). The right of possession was not abolished. The community did not control the money until it had voluntarily been given to the Apostles. The distribution was not made equally but according to need. These are not communistic principles. This is Christian charity in its finest display."

And think about it. If this was mandatory, if everyone had to do it, then would they be giving because they wanted to or because they had to? They would give, for many, because they had to. Please understand that these early Christians shared together not out of compulsion, but out of compassion; not out of obligation, but out of love.

And you can read about what giving is all about in II Corinthians chapters 8 and 9! And a good summation of this is given to us by Paul in II Corinthians 9:6-7, where he wrote, "**But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**"

That is how we are to give, with cheerful hearts and if you can't give cheerfully, then don't give at all! It really is as simple as that.

Now comes the problem. When someone can get something for nothing, people will take advantage of it. In Paul's letters he had to give some guidelines because of the abuse that was going on with people not working but just wanting to be taken care of. Listen to a few of Paul's points here.

The church must discern who the truly needy are. Paul tells us in I Timothy 5:3, **“Honor widows who are really widows.”**

Also, *if you can work to support yourself then you are not truly in need and you must provide for yourself.* We see that spoken of in II Thessalonians 3:10-12, **“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.”** (See I Timothy 5:8; I Thessalonians 4:11)

Now the church is not responsible for people if there are family members who can support them. We see that spoken of in I Timothy 5:3-4, **“Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God.”**

Now this one is interesting. *Those who are supported by the church must make some return to the church body, they must help out in the church.* Paul speaks of this in I Timothy 5:5, 10, **“Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. . . . well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.”**

And this one people are offended by, but Paul makes it clear that *it is the right of the church to examine the moral conduct before giving support to someone.* We see that spoken of in I Timothy 5:9-13, **“Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.”**

And lastly, *if the church is supporting someone in need it needs to be for the most basic necessities of living*, which should just make sense. Paul put it like this in I Timothy 6:8, **“And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”**

That just makes sense!

VERSES 36-37

Here we are introduced to a man named Joses who was also called Barnabas or son of encouragement! And he was a Levite who owned property.

Now that is interesting to me because, according to Numbers 18:23, and elsewhere, the Levites were not to have an inheritance, any land of their own, because the Lord was their inheritance.

But over time that was not practiced and here we see Barnabas owning land, a Levite!

But, now he sells it to help out those in need and it just shows us that what the Law was powerless to do, convincing him to give up his land, now that he is born again, he freely sells it! Why? Because the **Law** could not do what **Love** can accomplish!

Now, as we get into Acts chapter 5 next week, what we see Barnabas do here is going to make another couple jealous and it will lead to their fall!

As I close this evening, let me leave you with this to think about in regard to love and unity. We are told,

What about the church today? We build great buildings, but do we build great people? We may have well-oiled machinery and programs that are the envy of others, but how do we compare with the early church? When the church is great, there is a **greatness in unity**. As believers' hearts beat together in spiritual oneness, their fellowship of soul puts their common focus upon Christ. And when the world sees such great unity, it is impacted by the grace flowing from the church – **great grace**. There is also **great power**. People come to believe because they see resurrection life in the church. And when the church is like this, there is **great care** as its people expend their lives to help one another. How beautiful!