

Dealing With Opposition

July 8, 2018

Whenever you or I read a passage of scripture that talks about things like persecution taking place within the body of Christ – or when we think about things like religious freedoms being threatened, we usually think about opposition to our beliefs or to the gospel message as coming from government agencies or people who don't profess to have any faith or belief in God. But today, as we continue going through the book of Acts, we are going to be looking at how Satan can and does sometimes use people within the church to try and prevent the gospel message from being proclaimed.

And, hopefully, as we study how the Apostles were given the grace to graciously and boldly stand firm in the face of opposition – we will be encouraged to do likewise. We will also hopefully learn to be sensitive to God's truth and His leading to ensure that we don't fall into the trap of being used by Satan to hinder people from being made whole in Jesus' name.

Last week we touched on the fact that no matter how bad things might seem, either for ourselves or for our nation, Yahweh is the God of hope. He is always more than able and willing to heal and forgive when we truly repent and turn back to Him. That's why Peter was able to encourage the people saying, **“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”** But, as we pick up the story of what happened during and after Peter's second sermon of the New Testament Church, it becomes obvious that not everybody in the temple that day was receptive to what Peter and John had to say.

Acts 4:1-4 reads, “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. 2 They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. 3 They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. 4 But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”

Instead of starting at the beginning of this passage, I would like to start at the end first. Peter and John were both speaking to the crowd and taking advantage of the opportunity they had been given to witness to the people in attendance at the temple that day about the saving and healing power of Jesus. And Luke lets us know that a lot of the people who were listening to them responded favorably to what they had to say. A large number of them, about two thousand people in fact, repented and received Jesus that day. Luke said **“the number of men grew to about five thousand**, and if you remember back to the day the Holy Spirit arrived, about three thousand people repented and believed that day.

One of the things I find interesting in this passage is that the opposition Peter and John encountered that day in the temple didn't come from the people who had entered the temple for one of the daily sacrifices or for prayer. In fact, if you remember, earlier in the book of Acts, back in **chapter 2:46-47**, we were told this about the New Testament church, Luke said, **“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”** Instead, we are told that the people who got all bent out of shape by what Peter and John were preaching were the religious leaders.

At the time the New Testament church started, the Sadducees were the controlling party within the temple. The Sadducees had a pretty good grasp on Old Testament scriptures – but they didn't believe in things like a physical resurrection. So they didn't like a lot of what they heard Peter and John saying in the temple that day – and they wanted to put a stop to it.

What Peter and John had to say about Jesus' was a threat to what the Sadducees were trying to protect. Most Sadducees had learned to get along with the Romans who were in control. They had worked out an agreement that allowed them to remain in religious power, and they were allowed to keep their status and possessions. They were comfortable and didn't want anything to disrupt the status quo. And they were willing to do whatever it took to see that their comfortable lifestyle and status continued.

As I thought about that, I couldn't help thinking about how important it is for us to guard against that same kind of mentality creeping in to our own faith and the way we live out the profession of our faith. I couldn't help thinking

that maybe one of the reasons we really don't experience much opposition to our faith is because maybe we keep it hidden so we don't risk losing the lifestyle we enjoy living.

Luke tells us that, because it was evening, they arrested Peter and John. The religious leaders wanted to bring them before the Sanhedrin because the Sanhedrin had jurisdiction over anything that was considered a temple violation. Since the Sanhedrin was closed for the day, they arrested them to make sure that they didn't get away before they could be questioned by the Council.

Continuing on in our main passage, **Acts 4:8-11** reads, **"5 The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest's family. 7 They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'**

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! 9 If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, 10 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. 11 He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'"

The next day when Peter and John were brought before the rulers, elders, and the teachers of the law, they were first asked, **"By what power or what name did you do this?"** When they asked that question, what they were really saying is, "who do you think you are?" And they probably didn't think they would get much of an answer – after all, every adherent to the Jewish faith would have known that, in the temple, the high priest was the highest authority.

But then an amazing thing happened. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, gave basically a mini sermon to the religious leaders that linked the physical healing or physical salvation of the lame man in Jesus' name to the greater salvation that is available to anyone who calls on Jesus in true faith.

Two things in the encounter of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin really stood out to me. First, they were able to stand firm in their faith no matter what because they knew that God was with them and had sent the Holy Spirit to guide and direct them.

Luke 12:11-12 records Jesus saying, **“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”**

Even though Peter, like all believers, had received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had promised that, when facing things like persecution, we can expect special intervention on our behalf by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave Peter the right words to say and we can be confident that He will do the same for us if the need arises.

Secondly, by linking the healing of the lame man in Jesus’ name to the salvation that’s available to us as well in Jesus’ name, Peter lets us know that Jesus is in the business of making people whole.

If you’re here today and there are areas in your life that seem out of control or broken – areas where you need to experience healing – or areas where you haven’t experienced the abundant life Jesus came to bring us – be encouraged – Jesus knows what you’re going through and He wants you to be whole.

Being made whole doesn’t mean that we will always live a life of ease.

Helen Roseveare is a British medical doctor who worked for many years as a missionary in Zaire. During the revolution of the 1960’s, she often faced brutal beatings and other forms of physical torture. On one occasion, when she was about to be executed, she feared God had forsaken her.

In that moment, she sensed the Holy Spirit saying to her: Twenty years ago you asked me for the privilege of being identified with me. This is it. Don’t you want it? This is what it means. These are not your sufferings; they are my sufferings. All I ask of you is the loan of your body.

At that moment, the privilege of serving Christ through her sufferings overwhelmed Dr. Roseveare. After she was delivered, she wrote about her

experience with God: “He didn’t stop the sufferings. He didn’t stop the wickedness, the cruelties, the humiliation or anything. It was all there. The pain was just as bad. The fear was just as bad. But it was altogether different. It was in Jesus, for him, with him.” (Philip Ryken, *The Message of Salvation* (Inter-Varsity Press, 2001); submitted by Owen Bourgaize, Castel, Guernsey, United Kingdom)

We can boldly live out our faith and proclaim the gospel message even in the face of opposition because the world needs to hear the truth.

Acts 4:12 says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Jesus is not “a way”, He is “THE way.”