

## Acts 4:13-37

“Overcoming Opposition”

We saw Wednesday evening there in 2 Kings ch 2 how that the reason God fills us with His Spirit isn't for our personal rest and *relaxation*, but rather that we might be bold in times of *confrontation*. That we might be the witness He's called us to be of who He is, and I love the cohesive nature of the word of God, the fact that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, He never changes. and The principles and precepts of His word hold true generation after generation, what was true for Elijah and Elisha then, is true for you and me today, was true for Peter and John in Acts Ch 4.

For there we find Peter and John on trial, the Lord has worked a miracle through Peter, Peter utilized that platform to preach the crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus Christ, which got them thrown in jail and placed on trial. Because the religious leaders who were in authority at that time were a group of people called the Sadducees. The Sadducees rejected the whole premise of the resurrection, so as you might imagine when Peter and John were preaching the resurrection of Jesus, and the reality of the resurrection of *all* who believe in Him, that didn't go to well with them. So they immediately incarcerated them, had them placed in prison overnight and the next morning the trial began.

At that trial you recall we seen such men as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, those men who were there at Jesus' trial to confirm the fact that He would be crucified. The point being that Peter and John were readily aware of the brutality, and the vicious cruelty with which these men were capable of responding with in a situation should it not settle well with them. As far as they were concerned their lives were on the line and depending upon how they defended themselves they would live or die, by their words they'd be justified, or by their words they'd be condemned.

The 1<sup>st</sup> question out of the shoot put before them was a lead question of entrapment, “By what power, or by what name have you done this?” Now what do you do? You've personally seen the vehement hatred with which they treated Jesus, when *that* was going on you didn't even have the courage to confess that you even *knew* Him, lest you be filleted alive by the scourging and hung on a cross *beside* Him... Do you think its going to be any different now if you start speaking of Him as alive from the dead and people being made whole in His name, by His person, by His power? But in vs 8 of ch 4 we read that Peter, “*Filled* with the Holy Spirit, said to them.” The Holy Spirit came upon him, and in the midst of this interrogation he was filled with boldness, for what? The purpose of *confrontation*; that he might be the witness of Jesus Christ whom God had called him to be. Peter said, “Is this really why we're here? We're on trial because of a good deed done to a helpless man; you're interrogating us because you want to know by what means he's been made well? In that case let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom *you* crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by *Him* this man stands here before you whole.” The Lord gives Peter the wisdom to turn this circumstance into another opportunity to share the gospel with *these* guys. Notice vs 11-12 (read).

What's going on here? God is through Peter extending *another* opportunity to these guys to repent and be saved. He's making it clear that salvation is through Jesus, and Jesus alone, and now they have a choice to make. The patience of God blows my mind, they've rejected the ministry of J.B., which pointed to Jesus, they rejected the ministry of Jesus Himself, taking Him and hanging Him on the cross, and now God is reaching out again through the message of the gospel to these guys. I'm so glad that we serve a God of grace who's willing to extend Himself to an overall Christ rejecting world over and over and over again.

How many of us would be in the Kingdom if once God gave you a single chance to repent He cast you off? I wouldn't be here, and I have a suspicion that many of you wouldn't be either, but be encouraged by that in *your* witness, not everyone will respond the 1<sup>st</sup> time you share Jesus with them. That doesn't mean you remove them from your prayer list and consider them a loss, if God will reach out over and over and over again to the very men who scourged and crucified His only begotten Son, how much more is He willing to extend Himself to that person you work with, or your neighbor who seems so hostile towards the gospel? God isn't willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Something else that we could note in this portion of scripture is that often times the way to reach the masses is through a single individual. Peter and John took the time to minister to this individual crippled beggar, and through that 2,000 people received Jesus Christ and The person who has no time for the individual in need of Christ, probably won't be given too many opportunities to minister to masses. Jesus always had time for the one, whether it was the woman at the well, Nicodemus, the woman with the flow of blood, Zacchaeus, the list could go on and on, whenever you've got no time for that one person who needs Jesus to touch their lives, you've become more important, and busier than Jesus ever was, yet what servant is above his master?

Well, these guys thought they'd gotten rid of Jesus, and now here this entire movement has begun in the *name* of Jesus and He's more popular now in His physical absence than He ever was when He was ministering in the flesh. and Here are the apostles working miracles in His name and teaching that it's only in Him that we'll find salvation and acceptance in the sight of God.

Vs13-14

You see once this man was able to stand, there was no question where he stood. It would've been real simple for him to say, "Hey, thanks for the help and all, but a, this is getting a bit heavy for me I'll just be *walking* right on out of the court here." But Jesus had changed his life and he was willing to let people see that, how about you? How has Jesus changed your life, and does anyone else recognize that? Or is it questionable where you truly stand, Paul spoke to Titus of those who *profess* to know Him but in works they deny Him. That is, they undo with their lifestyle everything they've sought to show by their verbal witness. They have all the right words to say, but in the end their lives reflect more of the world than the reality of Christ.

There's nothing more powerful than the true testimony of a life transformed and made whole by Christ. How many people here were at one time drunks, or partiers in general, liars, fornicators, thieves and all the rest. and People knew that about you, but one day Jesus passed by you in all your lameness and said, "Look at Me" and He reached down and took you by the right hand and raised you up and made you whole. Your life was changed, and it was obvious, how can that be denied? It can't, a life transformed by Jesus is a powerful, irrefutable witness, and this healed beggar was "Exhibit A" in Peter's defense of the resurrection of Christ. I've shared with you before how floored my family and so many of my friends were when I received Christ, because I was so different. It's like, "What did you do with Jeff?" Hey, Jeff's dead, and it's no longer I that live but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. That's where this guy is at, and what can they do with that, they know who he *was* vs who he now *is* and they can't deny the transformed life that's right in front of them.

But we want to take note of a couple of things happening here in vs 13, this council was blown away by the boldness of Peter and John. That is, the certainty and assurance with which they spoke stunned them.

These scholars were set back by how the apostles handled the scripture, the way they wielded God's Word was just dumbfounding. Because they knew that they'd never been to the theological university of Jerusalem, that's what it means when it says they perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men. It's not saying that they were T-total idiots (though perhaps in their eyes they were) but that they had never received any formal education in the scriptures. So what gives, where does their insight and understanding, the illumination and application that they're able to draw from the scripture come from. Mark it well, "...they realized that they had been with Jesus."

Jesus had given them an irrefutable grip on the word of God, had taught them the Word rightly divided, had given them insight, illumination, understanding and application. and You know what? Jesus is still in the business of teaching those who follow Him *today* a balanced understanding of the Word of God as by the Spirit of God. Our understanding of the Word of God comes directly through the Holy Spirit's unveiling it *to* us that it might be made real and applicable *for* us. We read in 1 John 2:26-27, "*...I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*"

Now understand that what that's *not* saying is that we don't need Pastor's or teachers, people of that nature. Eph 4 tells us that these kind of men are given to the church by God for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. What it *is* saying however is that regardless of the vocal cords that are giving utterance to the Word of God, the only way it comes from my mouth into your mind with any understanding is by the Spirit of God illuminating the Word of God for you. I could rattle off all day long things from God's Word, but if the Holy Spirit isn't opening your understanding, you won't really be taught anything. Because He is our teacher, leading us into all truth.

How skillful are you at wielding the Word of God? Wouldn't it be nice if when you were engaged in confrontation in regards to your witness of Jesus Christ that people would be blown away at the way you wield God's Word? Not so that you look so cool, but to the glory of God... Then spend time with Jesus, let Him teach you as you spend time in His word, meditating on it, concentrating on it, contemplating it, that He might be illuminating for you the insight and understanding He wants to give you. The Psalmist wrote, "*I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation.*" Ps 119:99 Jesus wants to teach you how to handle His Word. But how can you learn it if you're never spending any real time in it?

Now there is a couple of things here that were perceived by these guys that though they perceived them, their perception was wrong. and I just point them out quickly, 1<sup>st</sup> of all they *perceived* that they were uneducated, and untrained men. They were wrong, they'd spent at least 3 yrs being educated in the Word, by the Living Word, Jesus Christ Himself personally. and They'd received *on the job training* regarding the ministry as Jesus would demonstrate for them the heart of God towards people in any and every type scenario that could be imagined. Then He would periodically send them out into surrounding cities 2 x 2 to minister, share the Word, heal the sick, deliver the demon possessed and all the rest. Then when they'd come back to Him, they'd have an "A.R." (After action review), discussing what'd taken place, and how to handle certain situations as they arose. So in reality, they were probably *the most* scholarly, educated in the scriptures, and trained men for the ministry there. 2<sup>ndly</sup> they perceived that they *had been* with Jesus. They were wrong, they *still were* with Jesus, Jesus hadn't left them, He was right there by the Power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them, "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*" Matt 18:20

There was nothing past tense about their relationship with Jesus, He was still with them, and He's with you as well, He'll never leave you, and never forsake you. So this situation is turning sour for the Sadducees, they're hearing the witness of Peter, and seeing the miraculous work, what can they say? (Vs 14 tells us, they couldn't say anything).

## Vs15-17

Notice the cynicism, they're reluctant to even say the name of Jesus, they're all "...lets severely threaten them not to speak to any man in *this name*." and The corruption of their hearts is obvious; they can't deny the miracle, even acknowledging the genuine nature of it. But they refuse to submit to the Lord who did it, all they're interested in is preserving their platform, they don't want this whole thing to spread, so they engage in operation cover up.

## Vs18

You know, rather than go through all this, don't you think it would've been easier to simply produce and display the body of Jesus? If they'd have produced Jesus' dead body, all their worries would go away, how can you say Jesus is alive, if you have His corpse in plain sight? But they couldn't do that, why not? Because Jesus *is* alive, there was no body to be found, they're not even seeking to really refute the reality of the resurrection, because what can they say, Jesus' tomb is empty. So instead they seek to hush the situation by threatening these guys not to speak *at all* or teach the people in the name of Jesus. and This is the *stipulation* we spoke of last week in this their cross- *examination*.

## Vs19-22

Couple things, 1<sup>st</sup> of all we notice that even though this council was completely unmoved as to what God might have them to do, they were moved by the pressure and the public opinion of the people. Why didn't they punish them? Because they were convicted by God and readily repented? No, because of the people, they were men pleasers. But what does the bible say, "*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*" Gal 1:10 Which is to say you need to decide who you aim to please, because if it's the people around you, you won't be pleasing to God, but if it's God, you won't always be pleasing to the people around you, and you've got to count the cost and decide which means more to you. and The bible is clear that to be friends with the world is to be an enemy with God. These guys made their decision and they did what they did on the basis of public opinion so that they could maintain the popular vote, poor choice.

Second of all notice that what the enemy meant to destroy, turned out for the glory of God. It started out looking bad, Peter and John on trial before the same court that sent Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion, seeking to entrap them in a way so as to put a stop to what they were doing. But ultimately this whole thing turned out for the salvation of at least 2,000 people, Peter was filled fresh with the Holy Spirit; he was given the platform to proclaim the gospel twice, once before the people, again before the leaders of the nation. Those who stood in opposition to Jesus confirmed the miracle performed in His name, the enemies of the gospel are confused and with out direction, Peter and John are more bold than they've ever been, and God is being given glory. God is able to take those things meant for evil and turn them for His glory.

Now back in vs 19-20 we have the apostle's repudiation of the stipulation placed on them by the Sanhedrin. They say, "Listen, you can decide for yourself whether or not it's more proper to listen to you than to God, but as for us we're going to speak the things we've heard and seen." Translation, we've got to do what God has told us, not what you say. and This should be the motivating factor in all our lives as to why we do what we do. Not, "Is it popular with the people, will it make me look cool, or perhaps just keep me out of the heat," but rather, "Is it right in the sight of God."

Now in this case they're defying their overseers and those who govern them. We have to be real careful here, because the bible is clear that the government that is in place is there by the ordination of God. and The only time it is permitted to stand in what might be considered as defiance against the government is when they seek to supercede the direction of the Word of God towards your life. Daniel refused to heed the government when they forbade him to pray, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to heed the government when commanded to bow down to the idol of the king. Moses' parents refused to have Moses killed as a baby even though Pharaoh had made the decree. These were areas clearly in violation of the ways and word of God, here Jesus had told them specifically to witness, and teach the gospel, they had to obey Him rather than these guys. Something else we want to draw out is the fact that their convictions touched every area of their lives; they didn't live in selective obedience to God's Word. What I mean by that is if your conscience allows you to get drunk, or have sex, or cheat on exams, or steal from work, yet you refuse to register for military service, or won't work on Sunday because of what you tell me is your conscience towards God, does little to convince me that you're cultivating a healthy biblical conscience. (By the way I have no biblical or personal problem with military service) but you get the idea. You can't pick and choose your arena of obedience, if you only obey when it suits your personal interests than as far as I'm concerned you really have no desire to be obedient at all. But the point here is that when push comes to shove, we have to obey God rather than man.

### Vs23-30

The supplication, overcoming opposition through the power of prayer, it's been said that prayer isn't an escape from responsibility, but rather is our response to *God's* ability. Several things we can glean here, we won't spend long on them. But I want you to realize that encountering opposition shouldn't be for us a cue to quit, but rather it should be seen as an appeal, or a prod to pray. They didn't run into this radical resistance and go, "Well, I guess its not God's will to go about it this way, we'll reroute or just cease this particular project." They got together, got on their faces, and prayed. What are you and I to do when we encounter opposition? Get on our faces and pray, God wants to do the work, and there's few things in this prayer that we can take note of that helped them to press on in the proper perspective.

But 1<sup>st</sup> all we notice that they all assumed the burden corporately, and we're of one accord collectively. and What that means is that they were of one heart and one mind as a body of believers, there was no contention in the ranks, they were all in agreement. and That's such a critical aspect of body life, God hates discord, and contention in the body of Christ, but there's an anointing to be found in unity, and just like we see here where the people of God are in *harmony* with one another and His Word, the *hand* of God will move. But we see here that they raised their "voice" to God, the word "voice" is singular meaning that one of them prayed and the rest were of one heart in agreement. It wasn't a free for all prayer circus, there was order in their midst.

There are 3 basic elements to this prayer if you want to etch them in your margin and they are #1 "God Created All Things" (Vs24), #2 "God Is In Control Of All Things" (Vs 25-28), and #3 As the result of #1 and #2, "God Help Us To Stay Committed In All Things" Its always good when you're confronted with difficulty to remember who it is that you're praying to. God created the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, is there anything to hard for God. Sometimes our problems seem insurmountable, but when placed in the perspective of who it is we're praying too, they begin to pale. So they begin the prayer by gaining the proper perspective of God. He's larger than any problem they may have.

There's a quick little nugget here regarding the inspiration of scripture, vs 24 "Lord, You...vs 25 by the mouth of Your servant David said." It may've come from David's mouth, but it was God who was speaking. The bible says, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*" 2 Tim 3:16 God breathed it all, He may've used various human instruments, but it's *His* Word.

But what's happening in vs 25-28 is that Peter is able to see their current circumstance in the light of God's Word. God has said these things would happen, that rulers would gather together against the Lord and His Christ. So even though the circumstance seems out of control, God is still very much in control, spoke about this in His Word so that we might be assured that none of this caught Him off guard but that it's all apart of His plan in the big picture.

How important it is to see our circumstances in the light of God's Word. Be it in conflict, "*...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,*" Eph 6:12-13 Some snare of sin rotting you from the inside out because you haven't come clean and confessed it before the Lord? The bible speaks to that, you need to confess it and forsake it. "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*" Psalm 32:1-5

Maybe you just need strength for today, you can pray according to Eph 3 that God would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, that you would be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. The Word of God speaks to your life.

So, God you created all things, You're in control of all things, now help us to continue in the things You've called us to.

Vs 29-30

They didn't pray that their enemies would be destroyed, or that they would be delivered, but that they would have the boldness and the grace to follow through with God's will done God's way for them. It's been said, "Don't pray for circumstances equal to your power, but power equal to your circumstances." "God just give us the grace, and the irrefutable witness, to glorify Jesus." They're not concerned for themselves but simply the glory of God, now that kind of prayer moves the hand of God, notice.

Vs31

Filled fresh again, and what was the result? Boldness to speak of the reality of a risen Saviour. We don't have time but if you get a chance research this phrase, "Filled with the Holy Spirit" and see how closely connected it is with speaking the Word of God with boldness. God gives us His Spirit that we might be one who wields His *Word* with *authority* and *witnesses* to Jesus *accurately*. They overcame their opposition through prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit upon their lives. (We'll finish reading the ch and then comment on it next time).

Vs32-37

Prayer points: (God help us to lay all that we have down at your feet, that we would spend time with You Jesus, meditating on Your Word, being taught by Your Spirit, that you might use us for Your glory. That we wouldn't see opposition as our cue to quit, but as encouragement and an appeal to pray, thank You that You've Created all things, You're in control of All things, now may we continue steadfastly in all that You have committed to our trust.

If you're here and you've never surrendered your heart to Jesus, God's Word speaks to you to. Come let us reason together says the Lord, though your sin be like scarlet I'll make you white like snow. Let me encourage you to open the door of your heart and let Jesus in today, all you have to do is ask.