



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Arrest of Peter and John

Acts 4:1-12

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I. The World Stands Opposed to the Gospel of Christ

- Acts 4 marks the beginning of persecution in the Church of Christ. Luke records episodes of further persecution in Acts 5, 7, 8 and 12.
- Yet, given the words of Christ Himself, as well as the treatment of Him by the Jewish and Roman authorities, this should come as little to no surprise to the modern reader.

- ❑ However, one of the most difficult biblical truths for twenty-first century Americans to grasp is that the world stands opposed to the Gospel of Christ. As a result, anyone who faithfully proclaims the true Gospel will be persecuted.

- ❑ In John 14:18-20, Jesus states:

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave 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.”

- ❑ Also, in Mark 13:9-11, our Lord says:

“But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. “The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. “When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.”

- ❑ In other words, from Christ’s perspective, persecution was not a matter of **if** it would happen, but rather, **when** it would happen.
- ❑ The Epistles of both Peter and Paul echo this truth: ‘Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’ (2 Timothy 3:12). ‘For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps’ (1 Peter 2:21).

- ❑ Consistent with the testimony of Christ in the Gospels and the Epistles of both Peter and Paul, Luke describes in these twelve verses, how the opposition began to mount against the Peter and the Gospel message he was proclaiming.
- ❑ Luke begins this Chapter, by stating in verse 1, ‘As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them...’
 - These officials stood in direct contrast to the Gospel message that Peter was preaching. However, these were not the only individuals and groups mentioned by Luke who were opposed to the content of Peter’s sermon.
 - In verse 6, Luke also mentions ‘Annas the high priest...and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.’
 - Finally, in verses 5 and 8, Luke refers to ‘their rulers and elders and scribes...’
 - In all, Luke explicitly mentions eleven individuals or groups of people: 1.) the priests; 2.) the captain of the temple guard; 3.) the Sadducees; 4.) Annas; 5.) Caiaphas;

6.) John; 7.) Alexander; 8.) all who were of high-priestly descent; 9.) Rulers; 10.) Elders of the people; and 11.) the Scribes.

- The priests were Levites who ministered in the Temple, assisting in the Temple worship. The priesthood was divided into twenty-four orders, and the priests rotated the duties and responsibilities of serving in the Temple. Each time a priest was called upon to serve, he did so for about three weeks. It seems that each priest would only serve in the Temple a few times during his lifetime. Consequently, the priests present here in Acts 4 were likely not happy when Peter ‘disturbed’ one of the only times they would be able to serve in such an honorable capacity.
- The captain of the temple guard was a high-ranking Jewish official, second in command only to the high priest. He was the head of the temple police force [Levites] charged with maintaining order throughout the entire temple complex. Recall that it was the Temple guards who arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- The Sadducees were one of four sects in ancient Judaism [the others being the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Zealots]. They were the aristocratic, wealthy [land-owning], high-priestly class [the high priest was typically chosen from this group]. They viewed only the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as authoritative and rejected rabbinical law and the oral traditions of the Pharisees as absurd. They believed that God was not actively involved in His creation and that man controls his own destiny. They denied the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, futures rewards and punishments, angels and demons. Given this, they were likely influenced by Greek philosophy. As such, they were enemies of the Pharisees.

Yet, for the Sadducees, theology was not nearly as important as politics. Their primary concern was power, wealth, position, and politics. They had little to no problem accommodating the Roman occupiers, so long as they could maintain their position in society. Therefore, they enjoyed privileged positions in society and managed to get along well under Roman rule. Hence, they viewed any movement that might upset order and authority [even when initiated by Jews] as dangerous. Their daily lives and primary duties centered on the Temple, thus, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., they ceased to exist.

- Annas was the high priest from A.D. 6 – 15, and at this time [early A.D. 30’s], it was actually Caiaphas, his son-in-law how was the official high priest. Yet, most likely, Annas remained incredibly powerful within the political structure of Jerusalem. Eventually, five of his sons, a grandson, and son-in-law of his would serve as high priest. In other words, Annas was likely the ‘power behind the scenes’ the real decision-maker. Just as we today refer to past presidents as Mr. President [today, for example, we refer to Bill Clinton as President Clinton], so past high priests still maintained that title.
- Caiaphas was the high priest from A.D. 18-36, serving the longest of any high priest in New Testament times. He was, of course, the high priest who condemned Christ and delivered Him up to the Romans.

- The Rulers, or ‘chief priests’ represented the twenty-four priestly orders.
- The Elders were likely the older men of distinction and influence in the community. They were heads of both their families and their respective tribes.
- The Scribes were most likely Pharisees, experts in the Law.
- The identities of John and Alexander are unknown, although John may be a reference to Jonathan, the son of Annas, who served as high-priest from A.D. 36-37. Regardless, the presence of individual, unknown names, coupled with the names of high-ranking officials, may be Luke’s way of demonstrating that all of Jewish society, from the ‘average Jewish male’ all the way to the high priest, was in opposition to Christ and the Gospel.
- The reason for this is most certainly to demonstrate the great opposition there was to the proclamation of the Gospel proclaimed by Peter in the Temple area.
- Further, the presence of so many high-ranking officials indicates the degree of seriousness the leadership viewed what Peter was doing, or rather, what he was preaching.
- It is important to note that throughout the first century, although the persecution of the Christian church began from Jews, the greatest persecution would come from the Romans, Gentiles. So, in fact, the whole world stands opposed to the Gospel of Christ.
- Since the whole world opposes the Gospel, it will necessarily lead to division.

II. **The Gospel of Christ will Cause Division**

- In Matthew 10:34-36, the Lord Jesus states,

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
 “For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.”

- Tragically, it seems that far too many churches care more about being ‘relevant’ to the pagan world than relevant to the God they claim to worship. We care a great deal about what the world thinks of our local church, often resulting in services primarily geared at reaching the unchurched as opposed to solely exalting Christ. I often hear that we should adopt whatever method it takes to reach the lost, without compromising the Gospel. However, in my, albeit limited, experience, every time ‘method’ becomes the focus, the Gospel is always compromised.

a. It Exposes Sin

- ❑ One of the most fundamental truths of the Gospel message is that it exposes sin in the life of a believer. Throughout Peter's first sermon [Acts 1:14-36] and his second sermon [Acts 3:11-26] (as well as his speech before the Sanhedrin, here in Acts 4:8-12), Peter **repeatedly** points out the sin of the Jewish establishment in the death of Jesus, the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.
- ❑ No doubt, as the Jewish leaders, especially Annas and Caiaphas, heard Peter's condemnation of them, they became a little more than just angry. Certainly no one likes to be called a sinner, or even 'worse' – a murderer. Yet, Peter boldly proclaimed the truth, and the sinful Jewish leadership hated it.
- ❑ This is one of the most profound characteristics of the Gospel: it is TRUTH and truth exposes falsehood; light dispels dark; and those in the dark flee from the light.
- ❑ This is why Martin Luther was quoted as saying, 'If my Gospel were received in peace, it would be no gospel.'
- ❑ The reaction of sinful man to the faithful proclamation of the Gospel is never apathy. The Gospel separates the sheep from the goats. As sinful man stands in light of the truth of God as revealed in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, it leads him either to repentance or rejection.

b. It Demands Change

- ❑ The second reason that the Gospel is divisive is because it demands change: change in the way one views both Himself and God. As a general rule, people flee from change, especially as they get older; however, this is exactly what the Gospel of Christ demands. [NOTE: It is Christ who changes us, we do not change ourselves; yet, the truth of change is inherent to the Gospel message. Indeed, God must change us if He is to accept us.]

i. In how One Views Himself

- ❑ The Gospel requires that one, first, change the way one views Himself. He no longer views himself as a self-sufficient, innocent individual. Rather, in light of the Gospel, every man stands guilty, condemned as a sinner.
- ❑ As the Apostle Paul states in Ephesians 2:3:

'Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.'

- ❑ In his second sermon, Peter calls his Jewish audience to 'repent and return' [Acts 3:19].
- ❑ Repentance involves a recognition of one's sin before God...a recognition the Jewish leaders were simply unable to have.'

i. ii. In how One Views God

- ❑ Not only does the Gospel demand that one change how he views himself; but, it demands one change how he views God.
 - ❑ The Jewish people and leaders believed that Christ was a liar...a blasphemer. However, if they were to avoid God's wrath and experience His blessings, they were required to not only repent of their sins [change they way they viewed themselves], but also turn to God in Christ [thereby changing their understanding of who Christ is].
 - ❑ Once again, not only did the Jewish people have to admit that Christ was who He claimed to be [and who the Old Testament said He was]; but, they also had to admit that they were wrong for delivering Him over to crucifixion.
 - ❑ Such an admission would be impossible apart from a change of heart, wrought by the sovereign work of the God the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ's work. Indeed, the hearts of the Jewish leaders were dead...hardened...unable to confess Jesus as Lord.
 - ❑ Many individuals today, who claim to be Christians, are no different than the Jewish leaders. They create in their minds a God they are comfortable with, appropriate to him the name of Jesus, and call themselves Christians. These individuals seek the blessings of salvation without the God of salvation. When challenged with the truth of God's Word, these individuals reply, 'Well, *my* God would never to *that*'
 - ❑ We are constantly called to change, conform our view of God into He who is revealed in His Word.
- ❖ From the movie, *Chariots of Fire* [1981]:

Rev. J.D. Liddell: 'The Kingdom of God is not a democracy. The Lord never seeks re- election. There's no discussion. No deliberation. No referenda as to which road to take. There's one right, one wrong. One absolute ruler.'

Sandy: A dictator, you mean.

Rev. J.D. Liddell: Aye [Yes], but a benign, loving dictator.

c. It Transforms

- ❑ A third reason that the Gospel causes division is that it transforms.
- ❑ This powerful truth is demonstrated in the actions of Peter in the Book of Acts as compared to his actions, revealed in the Gospels, during the trials of Christ.
 - In John 18, Peter denies Christ three times, in the courtyard of the High Priest, as Christ is on trial before the Sanhedrin. As Christ facing trial before Annas, Caiaphas,

and the Sanhedrin, Peter was denying Christ, not before the powerful Jewish authorities, but before a slave-girl and a slave of the High Priest.

- Yet, here, in Acts 4, Peter boldly proclaims the truth of the Gospel message powerfully before the most powerful court in the Jewish world – the very court that delivered Jesus Christ over to be crucified.
- However, the Gospel did not stop transforming lives in the first century...it continues to this day.
- Often times, individuals are raised in ‘Christian’ families and ‘Christian’ communities; yet, when they are truly converted, devoting themselves wholly to Christ, they find themselves as outcasts in families and communities that are ‘Christian’ by name. It is as though true biblical transformation through the work of the Gospel of Christ exposes the hypocrisy in what we have come to call ‘carnal’ Christians [a term that is, itself, fallacious].
- Unfortunately, the true transforming power of the Gospel threatens the ‘status quo’ today, just as it did in Jesus’ day.

In the Movie, *Luther*, after Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church, the Roman Catholic Church begins their many attempts to silence him. In this process, Pope Leo summons Luther to Augsburg to force him to recant his believe in the doctrine of justification by faith alone. After a sermon, declaring the authority of Scripture, Luther’s father goes to meet the young Reformer, pleading with him, ‘Just try and keep your mouth shut.’

- It was the boldness, first of the Lord Jesus Christ, then the Apostles, then the Reformers and all subsequent believers that bears witness, not only to the transforming power of the Gospel, but to its divisiveness as well.
- No doubt, the transforming work of the Gospel causes division – division between those who are fully devoted to Christ and those who are Christian in name only.

d. It Confronts the Traditions of [Religious] Men

- The next reason that the Gospel causes division is that it confronts the traditions of men. Ironically, it is within the self-righteous religious establishment where the division is the most evident.
- In **verses 1-2**, Luke writes, ‘...the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.’
 - The Sadducees, in accordance with their long-held traditions, rejected the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead as a creation of the Pharisees.
 - Further, Peter’s bold proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus not only threatened their tradition, it threatened the political stability they strived to maintain.

John B. Polhill writes: ‘the idea of a general resurrection was an apocalyptic concept with all sorts of messianic overtones. Messianic ideas among the Jews of that day meant revolt, overthrow of the foreign overlords, and restoration of the Davidic kingdom...The notes of Peter’s sermon alarmed them: resurrection, Author of life, a new Moses. These were revolutionary ideas. The movement must not spread. It must be nipped in the bud.’

- ❑ Even to this day, religious men and women often elevate closely guarded traditions to a level higher than Scripture. Tragically, the consequences of challenging these traditions, even within the church, are often greater than if one challenged the very Scriptures themselves.

e. It Confronts the Authority of Men

- ❑ The Gospel of Jesus Christ also causes division because it challenges the authority structures of men.
- ❑ In **verse 7**, Luke states that after the Sanhedrin had jailed Peter and John overnight, the high court brought the two apostles in, and ‘they...placed them in the center...’
 - According to the *Mishnah* [*M. Sanh. 4:3*], ‘The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing-floor so that they might all see one another. Before them stood the two scribes of the judges, one to the right and one to the left, and they wrote down the words of them that favored acquittal and the words of them that favored conviction.’
- ❑ Then, Luke states, the Sanhedrin ‘began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?”’
 - This was a question of **authority**.
 - The Sanhedrin viewed Peter and John as men who were not authorized by their [the Sanhedrin’s] authority to preach such things in the Temple precincts. The work of Peter and John amounted to ‘unauthorized preaching by unprofessional preachers.’ John Stott

Commentator Albert Barnes writes, ‘They [the Jewish leaders] were offended that unlearned Galileans, in no way connected with the priestly office, and unauthorized by *them*, should presume themselves up as religious teachers.’

- To the educated Jewish leader of the first century, authority was always derived from tradition and precedent. Educated Jewish leaders would study for years in rabbinical schools, learning what previous rabbis had declared. To ignore such precedent would, as D.A. Carson states, ‘indicate a certain arrogance, an independence of spirit in danger of drifting from the weight of tradition.’

- The Jewish leaders challenged Jesus in the same manner as they did Peter and John, questioning by what authority he cleansed the temple. Yet, Christ’s authority was equal to the Father’s, for He was sent by the Father, in His name, to do His will. In a similar fashion, the Apostles acted in Christ’s authority, for they were sent by Him.

❖ This is what the Sanhedrin did not realize: the apostles were authorized by Christ Himself, the exalted Lord of all creation...the King of Kings. Furthermore, as Jesus declares to Pilate, in John 19:11, during his Roman trial, all authority is derived from God. God derives His authority from no one, but Himself. Therefore, the authority in which the Apostles healed was from God Himself.

- ❑ Luke, then, states that as Peter is challenged by the Sanhedrin, he was, in **verse 8**, ‘filled with the Holy Spirit...’ and he began to boldly and powerfully proclaim the Gospel.
 - This was a fulfillment of Luke 21:12-13: ‘they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.’
 - As a result, of this, the Lord gave Peter a special, apostolic ‘endowment’ of the Holy Spirit in order to boldly proclaim the Gospel message.
- ❑ Yet, in these verses [8-12], under the **authority of Christ**, Peter does something fascinating: he ‘turns the tables’ on the Sanhedrin [just as Christ Himself did during His trials], and he **goes on the offensive** and **puts them on trial!**

- ❑ A similar situation occurred in the sixteenth century. Andrew Melville who stood up to James VI of Scotland (1566-1525) who was meddling in the preaching of the gospel at the time. This is what Melville said to the King: Melville famously stated:

“We must discharge our duty, or else be traitors both to Christ and to you, for there are two kings in Scotland. There is King James, the head of the commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James VI is, of whose kingdom he is not a lord, not a king but a member. We will yield to you your place, and give you all due obedience, but you are not the head of the church, you cannot give eternal life, nor can you deprive us of it. We charge you therefore to permit us freely to meet and to preach in Christ’s name.”

- ❑ Read **Acts 4:8-11**:

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom **you** crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this name this man stands here before you in good health. ‘He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by **you**, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone.’”

- ❑ It seems that the mainstream Christian community in this country is one of the most *defensive* groups in the world, always reacting to what the pagan world throws our way. Every time a new ‘discovery’ emerges [DaVinci Code, Tomb of Jesus, etc.] that apparently ‘discredits’ the claims of Scripture, the Christian community panics and scrabbles to make a ‘respectable response.’ It is as though we are always attempting to win over the ‘approval’ of the pagan scientific and scholarly community. Yet, we have the TRUTH...we have eternal life.
- ❑ What Peter demonstrates here at his trial is not an attempt to get the approval of the Sanhedrin, but a demonstration that the Gospel CONFRONTS the world, it doesn’t constantly react to it!
- ❑ It becomes rather clear, in Peter’s speech, that a further reason why the Gospel is division is because it is **exclusive**.

f. It is Exclusive

- ❑ It today’s post-modern, relativistic culture, one of the worst accusations that can be made of an individual is that he or she is ‘intolerant’ or ‘narrow-minded.’
- ❑ As a result, many in the Christian community have made many attempts to be more ‘open.’ However, **the true Gospel is intolerant of other religions!**
- ❑ Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven, and apart from Him is the way that leads to eternal punishment.
- ❑ In the face of the powerful Sanhedrin, Peter has no problem explicitly declaring this truth:

‘And there is salvation **in no one else**; for this is **no other name** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.’

g. It Exalts Christ

- ❑ Finally, the Gospel is divisive because it exalts Christ and Christ alone.
- ❑ As Peter is proclaiming the Gospel, he quotes from Psalm 118:22, saying, ‘He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone.’
- ❑ Christ and **Christ alone is the Chief Cornerstone, the cornerstone of the true temple (Ephesians 2:19-22)**. Salvation is in **His name alone**.
- ❑ Peter’s words concerning the exclusivity of Jesus Christ prove to exalt His name by declaring His uniqueness. He is truly, the ‘one and only’, ‘unique’ [*monogenes*] Son of God.
- ❑ Peter also declares, in **Verses 9-10**: ‘...as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the

Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands here before you in good health.’

- It is, in a very real sense, because the Sanhedrin delivered Christ up to be crucified, that the lame man was healed.
 - This is the *crux* of the sermon. The Greek word used in Verse 9, translated ‘has been made well’ [σοζω] means ‘physical salvation.’ Yet, the same root word is used in Verse 12, translated ‘salvation.’
 - In other words, the point Luke is making is that the healing of the lame man is a parable, pointing to our spiritual, eternal salvation...our deliverance from the guilt of sin and the judgment to come, in the name of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Salvation is in Him, not something He merely gives. Our resurrection is in Christ, not something that He simply gives; **He is** the resurrection and the life.

III. The Gospel of Christ will Succeed

- Lastly, in this text, it is clear that the Gospel will succeed in accomplishing all that God wills it to.
- Isaiah 55:11 states, ‘So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.’
- At the beginning of Chapter 4, Luke states that as Peter and John were proclaiming the Gospel message in Solomon’s Portico, ‘as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them...’
- The English here does not fully capture what was happening. In the Greek, the context indicates that the Jewish leaders **suddenly came up to them, interrupting them as they were speaking.**
 - Then, because the leaders were so ‘disturbed’ by Peter’s sermon, they arrested Peter and John.
- Yet, one of the most profound portions in this passage is Verses 3-4. In these two Verses, the Jewish officials arrest Peter and John and put them in jail. However, as they sit in jail, Verse 4 states, ‘But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of them came to be about five thousand.’
- In other words, even as Peter and John sit in jail, the Gospel is accomplishing God’s purposes.

- John Stott rightly states, ‘The Sadducees could arrest the apostles, but not the gospel.’
- However, what is clear in these twelve verses is that the primary purpose of the Gospel of Christ is that God might be supremely glorified through the salvation of His people.

Everett F. Harrison wrote:

‘Salvation was the supreme concern of this prince of apostles (Acts 2:40; 5:32; 15:11; cf. 1 Peter 1:5, 9, 10). It is found exclusively in Christ and ‘no one else,’ and it is an imperative need for sinful men (they ‘must be saved’). What had happened to the physical condition of the cripple, in that he had been made whole (literally, saved), was a parable for the healing of the whole man by the power of Christ.’

- As Peter states, ‘And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we **must be saved**.’ This divine imperative declares unequivocally the necessity of salvation in the name of Christ and Christ alone!