



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Arrest of Peter and John, Part II

Acts 4:13-31

April 8, 2007

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I. **God is Sovereign Over the Works of His Enemies**

- ❑ From the early chapters in Genesis through Revelation, we can see that God's enemies have attempted throughout the Scriptures, to thwart the plans of God.
- ❑ However, God is not like humans that He should fear or sense any degree of intimidation from His enemies.
 - In the great Psalm of David, Psalm 23, it states, 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.'
- ❑ In fact, because He is the Sovereign over **all** creation, He uses the works and plans of His enemies to further His pre-ordained plan. God created His enemies, to include Satan Himself; therefore, as *created beings*, His enemies are eternally subject to God's rule over them.
- ❖ The first example of this that we observe in this passage is that God uses the plotting and scheming of His enemies to fulfill His pre-ordained plans.
 - Possibly no clearer example of this exists than the plotting of the Jewish authorities and the work of the Romans in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- In **Verses 25-26**, the two apostles, now released by the Sanhedrin, quoted from Psalm 2, demonstrating that it had been fulfilled before their eyes, just a few weeks earlier.
- In the original context of this Psalm of David, the great king and patriarch is likely speaking of Israel's defeat of her enemies through the anointed king.
- However, this Psalm was also prophetic, in that it foretold of the rage of the Gentile enemies of Christ and His rejection at the hands of their *earthly* kings.
- The two apostles, then, in **Verse 27** apply this Psalm directly to the trials and crucifixion of Christ. They even point out Herod [fulfilling the 'kings of the earth'], Pilate [fulfilling 'rulers'] and, of course Christ, [fulfilling the 'anointed one'].
- Lest anyone think that the 'kings' and 'rulers' were successful, the two apostles clearly state that it was God who was glorified and magnified through the works of these pagan Gentiles.
 - In fact, because of Christ's obedience to the Father's will, to the point of death on the cross, the Father exalted His Son to the 'highest place' that He would be declared the **King of Kings**. In other words, the One who had been plotted against by the kings of the earth is the King of Kings!
 - The Gentiles raged against Christ, but Father vindicated Him through the Resurrection and Ascension!
- Read together, **Verses 27-28** read, 'For truly in this city there were gathered together against You holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.'
 - Notice that in their explanation of Psalm 2, in **Verse 27**, the apostles mention not only the Gentiles, but the peoples of Israel – the Jews.
 - In other words, the whole world stood against the Christ.
 - In **Verse 28**, the apostles make it clear that the plotting and scheming of the enemies of the Christ were in accordance with the **hand** of God and His **predestined purpose**. In other words, God actively ordained the events surrounding the death of Christ.
 - How do we know? Because, it was foretold by David, as revealed in **Verses 25 – 26**!
 - Possibly the clearest indication that God's sovereign will was accomplished through Christ and the events surrounding His life, death, and resurrection,

is the fact that it was all in perfect accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures.

❖ The second example of God's sovereignty over the works of His enemies is powerfully revealed in **Verse 14**: 'And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.'

- The healing of the lame beggar, in Chapter 3, was the work of the Exalted Christ through Peter.
- The Risen and Exalted One, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One whom the Jews and Gentiles had put to death, had **perfectly healed** [Acts 3:16] the lame beggar, who had been lame *from birth*.
- Luke emphasizes this truth, once again, in **Verse 14**, stating that 'the man who had been healed [was] **standing with them**.' He was now standing, after being unable to do so for 'more than forty years' **Verse 22**. In other words, this was not simply a 'partial' healing, or one that could simply be dismissed; it was a clear manifestation of the power of the Exalted Christ – for the healing was thorough, **complete** [Serving as a parable to our complete healing / salvation by grace through faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ].

- But, as this man stood before the Sanhedrin, the direct result of the Work of the Exalted Christ, '**they** [the Sanhedrin] **had nothing to say in reply**.' Luke goes on to record, in **Verses 15 – 16**, that as the members of the Sanhedrin conferred with one another, they said, 'What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and **we cannot deny it**.'

- The greatest problem that the Sanhedrin had at this point was that the apostles had broken no Levitical law. They were, in fact innocent.
- This passage, especially Luke's words in **Verse 14** ['they had nothing to say in reply'], reveals another powerful truth of God's sovereignty over His enemies – **He silences them**.

◆ Romans 3:19 states, 'Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.'

○ **Martin Luther**, in his commentary on the Romans 3:19 writes:
'The Law declares all men to be unrighteous, in order that through this very judgment all may confess themselves to be unrighteous, no longer regard themselves as righteous and no longer boast of their righteousness, but acknowledge themselves guilty before God. To praise and glorify God means for us to be silent [*before Him*], not to extol ourselves [*our good works*], but believe that we are lost sinners.'

- **John Calvin**, in his Commentary on this verse, writes:

‘that is, that every evasion may be cut off, and every occasion for excuse. It is a metaphor taken from courts of law, where the accused, if he has anything to plead as a lawful defense, demands leave to speak, that he might clear himself from the things laid to his charge; but if he is convicted by his own conscience, he is silent, and without saying a word waits for his condemnation, being even already by his own silence condemned. Of the same meaning is this saying in Job 40:4, “I will lay my hand on my mouth.” He indeed says that though he was not altogether without some kind of excuse, he would yet cease to justify himself, and submit to the sentence of God. The next clause contains the explanation; for his mouth is stopped, who is so fast held by the sentence of condemnation, that he can by no means escape. According to another sense, **to be silent before the Lord is to tremble at his majesty, and to stand mute, being astonished at his brightness.**

- **Douglas Moo**, in his commentary on Romans 3:19 writes:

‘The purpose for which the words of Scriptures address the Jews is ‘that every mouth might be stopped and the whole world held accountable to God.’ The terminology of this clause reflects the imagery of the courtroom. ‘Shutting the mouth’ connotes the situation of the defendant who has no more to say in response to the charges brought against him or her. The Greek word translated ‘accountable’ occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures, but is used in extra-biblical Greek to mean ‘answerable to’ or ‘liable to prosecution,’ ‘accountable’. Paul pictures God both as the one offended and as the judge who weighs the evidence and pronounces the verdict. The image, then, is of all humanity standing before God, accountable to Him for willful and inexcusable violations of His will, awaiting the sentence of condemnation that their actions deserve.’

- ◆ Reading Paul’s word in Romans 3:19, and observing the silence of the Sanhedrin in light of the claims of the apostles and the complete healing of the lame man, one is struck by the clear irony in this situation.

- It is as though, the ‘tables have turned.’ The members of the Sanhedrin [the most powerful Jewish court in the land] **the judges before whom the apostles** [and the healed man] **stand, are now the ones on trial!**
- In light of the truth of the claims of the apostles and obvious work of the Exalted Christ in healing the lame man, and the transformation of the apostles into bold heralds of truth, **the Sanhedrin is silent!**
- Also, it is a powerful truth that, as John Stott writes, ‘they [them members of the Sanhedrin] made no attempt to discredit the apostles’ witness to the resurrection, although they knew that it was the center of their message.’
- This scene foreshadows that great and terrible day when the Sanhedrin judges will become the ones being judged by the Great Judge...the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In that day, they will, once again, be silent in the presence of the Sovereign Potentate of Creation!
- Then, as a result of the innocence of the apostles, the Sanhedrin threatened and released them.

J. Klausner [a twentieth-century Jewish historian] wrote, ‘This was the first mistake which the Jewish leaders made with regard to the new sect. And this mistake was fatal. There was probably no need to arrest the Nazarenes, thus calling attention to them and making them ‘martyrs.’ But once arrested, they should not have been freed so quickly. The arrest and release increased the number of believers; for these events showed on the one hand that the new sect was a power which the authorities feared enough to persecute, and on the other hand they proved that there was no danger in being a disciple of Jesus (for He, of course, being the One who had saved them from the hand of their persecutors!).’

II. God is Sovereign Through the Works of His People

- ❑ Not only is God sovereign over His enemies, but He reveals His sovereignty through His people as well.

a. Through the Works of the Apostles

- ❑ Throughout the Book of Acts, the Exalted Christ demonstrates His Sovereignty and power through the works of His Apostles. As Luke writes in Acts 2:43, ‘Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.’
- ❑ In the immediate context, it is once again clear that the healing of the lame man was such a sign. The Exalted Christ healed this man **completely** and he was **standing** before the Sanhedrin, Luke states in **Verse 14**.
- ❑ It was the signs and wonders that authenticated the message of the Apostles as well as their identity as ones sent by Christ. Furthermore, as the Scriptures had not yet been completed, the signs and wonders confirmed the authority of the Apostles as they completed the writing of the New Testament Scriptures.

b. Through the Scriptures

- ❑ As is clear in **Verses 24-26**, the Apostles submitted to the authority of the Scriptures and used them to interpret the events of surrounding the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.
- ❑ It was through the fulfillment of the Scriptures that God supremely demonstrates His sovereign purpose and plan that **He** had predetermined must occur.

c. Through Prayer

- ❑ The prayers of the Apostles also demonstrate their submission to God’s sovereign rule.
 - In **Verses 29-30**, the Apostles pray, ‘And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while

You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.’

- Notice, in this prayer, several points which powerful reveal God’s control over this particular situation.
 - First of all, the apostles appeal to the Lord to ‘take note’ of the threats of the Sanhedrin. In so doing, the apostles acknowledge that the Jewish authorities can only act in accordance with the authority given them by God Himself. The apostles most certainly realize that if the threats of the Sanhedrin are actualized, it is only because the Sovereign Lord allowed it, for He is the One in absolute control.
 - Secondly, the apostles, knowing God’s sovereign plan will be accomplished, ask confidence to speak His Word. So often today, we pray that pain and suffering would diminish, yet the apostles knew that God is supremely glorified when His Word is proclaimed, so they asked for continued boldness and confidence in light of inevitable persecution.
 - Thirdly, they recognize that it is God’s had that stretches forth to heal, and it is God who performs signs and wonders through the name of Jesus.
 - Ultimately, the wonders and signs of the apostles pointed to the fact that Christ had been raised from the dead and that He had been exalted to the right hand of God the Father and that He ruled as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

d. Through the Holy Spirit

- As is true of all works of God, the Trinitarian nature of this passage is clear. God demonstrates His sovereign rule through His people in a manner that is fully consistent with His Triune nature.
- As **Verse 31** reveals, ‘And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.’
 - In other words, the prayer of the apostles was answered, and God did so (1.) In accordance with the will of the Father [Verse 29]; (2.) through the name [authority] of the Risen and Exalted Christ [Verse 30]; (3.) through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit [Verse 31].

e. Through their Proclamation of the Gospel Message

- The proclamation of the Gospel of the Risen and Exalted Christ by the apostles stands as ‘book ends’ to this section of Scripture.
 - In **Verse 13**, Luke states that the Sanhedrin ‘as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.’
 - Through the sovereign power of God, these untrained, uneducated men are now boldly proclaiming the truth of the Gospel in throughout the Temple and in the presence of the powerful Sanhedrin.
 - Further, the cowardice of Peter in denying the Lord three times during His trial [just two months earlier] has been transformed into fearless proclamation.
 - Luke states that the Sanhedrin recognized these men as having been with Jesus, as he too was an untrained man, yet spoken with amazing authority [John 7:15-16, 46].
 - Once again, this is a fulfillment of the words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels. Luke 21:14-15 states, ‘So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute.’
 - After the Sanhedrin convened, after interrogating the apostles, they realized they could not punish the men, for they had broken no law [as **Verse 21** states, they found ‘no basis on which to punish them’], so, as **Verse 18** states, ‘...when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.’
 - However, the apostles recognized that to submit to the Sanhedrin, in their demands, would be to disobey the calling of God on their lives, so they said, in **Verses 19-20**, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’
 - The words of the apostles are reminiscent of Luke 19:39, ‘Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him [Jesus], “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” But Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out.”’
 - Notice the irony here: **God silences the powerful, educated men of the Sanhedrin, and powerfully proclaims His truth through His uneducated common Galilean apostles.**

- The ‘defendants’ are the bold witnesses; whereas the accusers are timid!

Today, the Church so often ‘begs and pleads’ with professing Christians to boldly proclaim the Gospel, as most of us are too afraid to do so for fear of rejection. Yet, as we see here in Acts, the Sanhedrin could not keep the early disciples of Christ from boldly proclaiming the Gospel. As the Apostle Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 9:16, ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.’

- Notice as well that the things that Peter and John saw and heard, namely the resurrection and miracles of Christ, are true facts in accordance with the Law of God because they can be substantiated on the basis of two witnesses [Deuteronomy 19:15].

E.F. Bruce writes, ‘It is particularly striking that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion (so far as our information goes) 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 have seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!’ [But of course, they could not refute it!]

- Finally, in **Verse 31**, Luke states, ‘And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.’
 - Such is the truth of God’s working through His people today: He accomplishes His purposes through the faithful proclamation of His Gospel message. He ordains not only the ends, but the means!

III. God is Sovereign Over ALL Creation

- Immediately following their release, Peter and John prayed in **Verse 24**, ‘O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM...’
 - In this prayer, the apostles address God as *Despotes* [or Sovereign Lord], an uncommon title for God throughout the New Testament [only used five other times]. The word is the root cognate for the English word ‘despot’ meaning ‘absolute ruler.’
 - Yet the most significant aspect of this prayer is that they appeal to God as the Sovereign Creator.
 - God’s divine sovereignty, His supreme rule, is predicated on the truth that He **created *ex nihilo* – ‘out of nothing.’** He did not fashion existing matter into the form we see today. Rather, before time [which is, itself, a created *thing*], there was God and nothing. Therefore, **EVERYTHING**...absolutely everything was created by Him...for Him. He is subject to no one and the nothing because He created EVERYTHING. This is why the Bible begins with the Creation account.

- This manner of addressing God as Creator is common throughout the Old Testament.
- Moses says of the LORD in Exodus 20:11, ‘For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.’

Nehemiah 9:6 states, ‘You alone are the LORD. You have made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, the Seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before You.’

- See also, Psalms 146:6 and Isaiah 42:5.
- Often times, when we think of God’s sovereignty, we think of the doctrine of predestination which concerns the fore-ordination of events surrounding the lives of humans. However, the sovereignty of God is much more comprehensive, involving God’s rule over ALL CREATION.

John Stott correctly states, ‘In his public ministry by turning water into wine, stilling a storm, multiplying loaves and fishes, and walking on water, Jesus gave a preview of nature’s final, total subservience to Him.’

- Through His death, burial and resurrection, Christ became the First Fruits of all who believe. It is upon the basis of His finished work that all who believe will be resurrected spiritually and bodily. Further, Christ’s completed work redeems not only His people but the entire Created order, for we shall be with Him in the New Heaven and New Earth.
- This is why through Adam, the head of the Old Creation, death entered into all mankind, but in Christ, the Second Adam, the Head of the New Creation, we may be New Creatures *in Him* – we shall be His people and He shall be our God.