

Only Jesus Is Lord (Psalm 2; Acts 4:23–31)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/4/2021)

Introduction

In Acts 4, we see how Psalm 2 played out in the very beginning of the church.

1. The occasion of the apostles' first arrest (Acts 3)

Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer and were used of the risen Lord to heal a 44-year-old man, lame from birth. The commotion caused by the healed man, leaping and praising God provided Peter with the opportunity to preach the gospel and 5000 people were saved.

2. The arrest and the authoritarian orders conveyed (Acts 4:1–22)

The enraged leaders of the people (the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees), were annoyed that Peter preached that Jesus was raised from the dead, so they arrested Peter and John and put them in ward. The next day they called the council together and interrogated them, demanding to know by what authority and power they healed the lame man.

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, told the rulers that the stone they rejected was established to be the chief cornerstone. *Jesus* was Lord. The frustrated authorities, having no answer for the obvious miracle but fearful of the expanding doctrine, ordered them “*not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus*” (4:19). Peter responded, “*We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard*” (4:20). This statement plainly demonstrates that obedience to God may require *civil disobedience*. Francis Schaeffer wrote, “If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then the government has been autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the living God.”

3. The disciples' reaction to the prohibition (4:23–31)

The civil authorities could not punish the apostles for fear of the people who were all praising God for what had happened. They just threatened and released them. The apostles reported on threats and prayed to their sovereign Lord, not that God would stop the persecution, but that in it, they would be granted power to continue preaching His Word with all boldness. God answered their prayer (4:31).

The text presents three powerful truths that we need in preparing for the civil threats that may soon take away the religious liberty we have so long enjoyed.

1. Persecution is to be expected for followers of Jesus (Matthew 5:10–12; 2 Timothy 3:12, 13).

a. Most persecution comes from wicked civil authorities who will not submit to God's laws. God established civil authority as an extension of Divine authority. When civil authority acknowledges God and His right to govern His creatures through duly constituted human representatives, the governed experience freedom (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13–16).

b. All civil authority, whether good or evil, is sovereignly controlled by God (Daniel 2:21). God is sovereign, and no one sits on any throne unless God permits. However, that does not keep those in authority from resisting God and His will and His purpose (Psalm 2:2, 3). Adam's sin consisted in his desire to be *equal* with God. His offspring want more than that: they want power to rule over others with absolute authority. They cannot tolerate that Christ is Lord of all, and they would expel Him if they could.

c. The real enemy behind the civil authorities who persecute Christians is Satan. Satan strives to overcome God's sovereign rule by extremely clever manipulation. Though he is but a creature, he lusts af-

ter God's throne (Isaiah 14:13, 14). Revelation warns us, "*Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*" (12:12, 17). Thus, the church is the main target of the enemy's wrath.

2. As Jesus suffered in the will of God, so His followers will suffer in the will of God (Acts 4:27, 28).

- a. Christ's followers must remain resolute, determined to persevere, knowing that the Lord will keep, strengthen, and enable them to stand firm (1 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:12; Hebrews 10:36–39). Revelation was written to encourage the persecuted saints in the Roman Empire (Revelation 13:10;14:12).
- b. The apostles submitted their cause to God in prayer. They understood that obedience and perseverance were not within the power of human flesh but had to be the work of the Holy Spirit (4:31).

3. Believers are God's soldiers in the battle against the rule of wicked authorities.

- a. We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). John Calvin commented on this: "Let us console ourselves with the thought that we are rendering the obedience which the Lord requires when we endure anything rather than turn aside from piety. And that our courage may not fail, Paul stimulates us by the additional consideration (1 Corinthians 7:23), that we were redeemed by Christ at the great price which our redemption cost him, in order that we might not yield a slavish obedience to the depraved wishes of men, far less do homage to their impiety."
- b. Faithfulness to the Redeemer must be the believer's first and only consideration (Revelation 2:10).

Conclusion

On this day that we celebrate our independence and freedom from the tyranny of the British throne, we must remember that this freedom is a very fragile thing. Those who govern must understand that they are themselves governed by a higher authority and that the Lord's churches are free from all civil control.

The Puritans, who founded this great constitutional republic, were characterized as those who "bowed in the dust before [their] maker as they set [their] feet on the neck of [their] king." May God grant us this grace to be overcomers in a way that honors our glorious King.

The Scottish Covenanters confronted King James of the King James Bible and were jailed in the London Tower for it. They argued, "There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of the commonwealth, and there is King Jesus, the Head of the church, whose subject King James is, and of whose kingdom he is not the head, nor a lord, but only a member."

Jesus is still Lord. Our submission and obedience belong to Him first and foremost. "*Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling*" (Psalm 2:11). The Lord is sovereign, and He laughs at the petty tyrants who think they are in control. "*Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth*" (v. 10). Jesus is coming (2 Thessalonians 1:6–10).

As for what we must do now, we must be ready for civil disobedience and the consequence of that action. The Lord is with us.