

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 4

BEHOLD THEIR THREATENINGS

The Word of God instructs us to obey those in authority over us, including government officials, as long as our obedience does not violate the Word of God. So although Peter and John are instructed to no longer preach the gospel, Jesus commanded them (and us) to go into all the world and preach the gospel.

Most of us will never experience the persecution the early disciple faced, but if we are ever in a situation similar to theirs, God will fill our mouths with an answer. God can accomplish much through the unity of believers. When we give willingly to the Lord and walk in unity, favor will be upon our lives and many will be supernaturally ministered to.

PETER, JOHN, AND THE RELIGIOUS COUNCIL (1-23)

Peter and John are brought before the religious council. They want to put a stop to the message Peter and John are preaching. Peter and John are held overnight to be questioned the next day.

Peter, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit preaches a salvation message to the council. Observing their boldness, the Council recognizes that Peter and John had been with Jesus. Yet they cannot deny the miracle of the lame man, and they fear the people.

They finally release Peter and John threatening to punish them if they speak about Jesus, but these disciples respond by saying they must obey God. Upon their release, Peter and John go to the local church and report everything the chief priests had said.

PETER AND JOHN ARRESTED

Act 4:1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, (suddenly) came upon them,

Verses 1 through 4 describe the results of Peter's sermon in chapter 3. This captain is in charge of the 30 guards stationed throughout the temple. Peter's sermon, like Jesus' sermons, will result in the salvation of some and adverse reactions by others. Opposition to Peter's message will come from organized religion, just as it had in Jesus' ministry.

Act 4:2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Being grieved (agitated, displeased) that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

These religious men are upset and angered because the disciples preach without first asking their permission. The Council is also frustrated because many people believe the message being preached, and the lame man stood before them as evidence of the truth of that message.

Peter is preaching and teaching. (He is teaching because many who had been born again on the day of Pentecost and afterward are present in the crowd [2:41, 47].) Peter once again brings out the essence of the gospel in this sermon just as he had in his first (2:23-31): the resurrection gives the gospel its power to deliver and save. Because Jesus was resurrected, believers will also be raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-20).

However, the Sadducees do not believe in angels or the resurrection (23:8). It is bad enough for them to hear doctrine they do not believe; it is worse to see the people accepting and following that doctrine.

Act 4:3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.

And they laid hands (seized violently) on them, and put them in hold (jail cell) unto the next day: for it was now eventide (after 6:00 p.m.).

The immediate reaction of the religious leaders is an attempt to stop people from being saved. Their efforts will prove ineffective. After the arrest of Peter and John, thousands in the crowd will receive Jesus Christ as their Lord.

Because it was illegal to have a trial after sundown, they put them in prison for the night. Interestingly, it was the same Sadducees who had tried Jesus after sundown in a completely illegal manner, just before Passover.

Act 4:4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Howbeit many of them which heard the word (logos) believed; and the number of the men (males) was about five thousand.

“Howbeit” shows that despite the attempts of the Sadducees, a great number of the crowd believe in Jesus and are born again. It is difficult for the religious leaders to stop people from believing when a miracle is standing directly in front of them, and they have just heard the gospel preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Act 4:5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers (of the Sanhedrin), and elders (of the temple), and the scribes (those who knew Old Testament law).

THE COUNCIL

Act 4:6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

Annas was a ringleader in extortion. He headed up a political group that took money from the bandits in the Negev, along the shores of Galilee. This is one area Herod cleaned up. He caught and confiscated the money of many of the bandits who hid in the caves along the shore.

Annas also accumulated money by selling sacrificial animals at inflated prices in the temple. Jesus displayed His disdain for this practice in Matthew 21: 12-13 when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers.

Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. They worked together (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24). John and Alexander were probably two of Annas's sons. Much of the remaining ruling body of the Sanhedrin was comprised of relatives of Annas and Caiaphas. This ruling body could be labeled a "kangaroo court." It was considered the supreme Jewish court of the land.

There were three parts of the Sanhedrin:

1. The rulers (24): chief priests
2. The elders (24): political leaders
3. The scribes (22): theologians

Act 4:7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?

And when they had set (stood) them in the (their) midst, they asked, By (in) what power (dunamis), or by (in) what name, have ye done this?

Their question is concerning the group with which Peter and John are affiliated. The Sanhedrin is looking for a political or religious group Peter and John represent, much like people today would question the denomination backing a particular minister.

PETER ADDRESSES THE COUNCIL

Act 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

Apparently Peter has been praying in tongues during his night in prison, so he has a ready answer. Here Peter demonstrates the importance of staying filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). It is the fulfillment of Matthew 10: 18-20.

THE ISSUE OF THE HEALED MAN

Act 4:9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

Peter is now being sarcastic and embarrassing the court officials. They have asked Peter to name the authority who sent him, but Peter reminds them the whole incident began with the healing of an incurable, well-known cripple, a man who is standing with Peter (14).

Peter recognizes the diversion tactic used by the court. Their strategy is to draw him away from the real issue (the man being healed), but Peter keeps the issue clear and focused.

THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED

Act 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

Act 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Verse 11 is a quote from Psalm 118:22-23. It was also quoted by Jesus to the same group of religious leaders in Matthew 21:42-44. These verses referred to Jesus and His resurrection. He had been rejected by His own and crucified, but God the Father raised Him from the dead and placed Him as the chief foundation stone of the church. All others are built upon Him (Ephesians 2:20-22).

“Stone” is a common title for Jesus in the Word of God, whether prophetically or symbolically:

- a) The Rock of Salvation (Exodus 17:1-7)
- b) The Rock of Judgment (Isaiah 8:14; 1 Peter 2:8)
- c) The Rock of Provision (Isaiah 26:3-4)
- d) The Foundation Rock (Psalm 118:22-23; Isaiah 28:16; 1 Corinthians 3:11)
- e) The Foundation of the Church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20-22)
- f) The Rock of Judgment for the Unbeliever (Daniel 2:35; Matthew 21:44)

SALVATION IN NONE OTHER

Act 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none **other** name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Peter informs them that Jehovah, the redeemer of the Old Testament, is the same Jesus they crucified. This is the same Jesus in whom Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and others put their trust and received salvation.

4:12 other, heteros (het-er-oss); Different, generic distinction, another kind, not of the same nature, form, or class. Here *heteros* denotes a distinction and an exclusivity, with no second choices, opinions, or options. “Jesus, You are the One. You are the only One. There is no *heteros*, no other!”

THE COUNCIL’S RESPONSE

BOLDNESS OBSERVED BY COUNCIL

Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled (wondered); and they took knowledge of (remembered) them, that they had been with Jesus.

Boldness is a manifestation of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Peter and John are not intimidated or fearful of being before these leaders. The Council discerned Peter and John had no formal education, yet were speaking things which could only come by revelation. By remembering Peter and John had been with Jesus in His earthly ministry, they begin to comprehend that the same miracle working power and anointing that had been on Jesus was now on his followers. The Council were the very ones who put Jesus on the cross, and now they were being confronted by a multitude of "little Jesuses" -- Christians.

Act 4:14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

It is difficult to argue with a miracle, especially when the miracle is widely known and standing before the accusers. Peter, who was speechless at the crucifixion, even denying the Lord, now render these men speechless.

THE COUNCIL CONFERS

Act 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

The Council weighed the evidence in secret.

Act 4:16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

Religion is contradictory. It does not care about people, yet it appeases them. The real desire of the council is to get rid of Peter and John, but they fear the reaction of the multitudes. The religious leaders recognize it is the people who provide money and power to them, but they care nothing about the people. They do not want to offend the people, yet they realize their religious empire is at stake.

THE COUNCIL'S COMMAND

Act 4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

The Council releases Peter and John with a strong threat that their message go no further, yet the message will soon go worldwide. (Religion fears the name of Jesus because of it's power.) Peter and John have broken no laws. In fact, they have healed a person, which should bring praise from the city leaders. Law is supposed to protect people from the evil ones not threaten the innocent.

Act 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

Again, it is the name which has so much power that threatens the Sadducees.

PETER AND JOHN RESPOND

Act 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

Peter tells the council to make the decision for themselves. They are judges over natural men. Now they can be judges over God's will.

Act 4:20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Peter and John in essence say, "We are nothing more than errand boys." They tell the Sanhedrin they can only say and do what they saw Jesus say and do.

PETER AND JOHN RELEASED

Act 4:21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

The Council tells Peter and John they will not beat them, but threatened to do so if they refused to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. The religious leaders do not beat Peter and John immediately because they are heroes in the eyes of the people because of the healing of the crippled man.

Act 4:22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

For the man was above 40 years old, on whom this miracle (semeion: sign) of healing was shown.

This man who is healed had been laid at the gate since he was young. He had been laid at that same gate for over 30 years and so was recognized and well-known by everyone in the city.

Act 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

"Their own companions" is the church which began in chapter 2. It is the "household of God" (Ephesians 2:19), the local church or expression of His universal church. Persecution did not

drive the people away from the church; it drove them to it. The religious leaders did not keep their threats a secret, but made them known to all who were present. Church met each day, and immediately after leaving the Sanhedrin, Peter and John go directly to church.

BELIEVERS IN ONE ACCORD (24-33)

In response to the report of persecution, the believers lift their voice to God in unity and release the outcome of the threats against them to the Lord. They acknowledge the guarantee of their deliverance is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They then pray for boldness to speak the Word of God and for signs and wonders to follow the preaching of the Word.

RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION

Act 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

And when they (the congregation) heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made (designed) heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

The report of persecution causes the entire congregation to turn their voice to God. They do not become despondent, but instead worship God and put Him in remembrance of His Word.

They remind God the entire universe and earth are made after His own design. God designed the universe, Jesus created it (Colossians 1:16-17). If God had a plan for the earth, He must have a design and plan for His church.

If the earth can cope with opposition in nature, surely God has designed a plan for the church to cope with opposition from religion. If the earth can overcome the curse, so can the church. Even the wicked judges who have just threatened Peter and John are created by God. If God created them, He can also handle them.

4:24 One Voice, POWER OF UNITY. The third and fourth chapter of Acts relate the story of the first major crisis faced by the early church. Peter and John were imprisoned and then warned by the Jewish leaders to never again mention the name of Jesus. Instead of fleeing for their lives or separating from their brothers and sisters, they went immediately to the church and “reported all the chief priests and elders had said to them” (verse 23). The members of the body of Christ responded together by raising their voices to God in prayer “with one accord.” This is a vivid example of the kind of spiritual unity that results in the lives of those who are “filled with the Holy Spirit” and who “walk in the spirit.”

Act 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

Who (Christ) by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen (national leaders) rage, and the people imagine (meditate on) vain (empty, futile) things?

Old Testament prophets spoke God's Word, not their own (2 Peter 1:21). The Minister of the church now quotes Psalm 2: 1-2, were David prophesied of God's attitude toward national governments who try to stop the impact of gospel on society.

TO ATTACK BELIEVERS IS TO ATTACK THE LORD

Act 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

Psalm 2:2 calls Christ "his anointed." The word "Christ" means "anointed one." Jesus was anointed when he arose from the dead and was seated at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3-9). Throughout history, the leaders of nations and religions have stood against the Father and against the Lord. They have all fallen, and the congregation knows this situation will be no different. To attack miracles and the message is to attack the Lord; to attack the people of the Lord is to attack the Lord Himself (Matthew 25:40; Acts 9:4).

Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

For of a truth against thy holy child (sinless humanity) Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

THE RESURRECTION: GUARANTEED DELIVERANCE

Act 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

The congregation releases the outcome of the threats of these judges into the hand of God and out of their own hands. They are taking God at His Word that vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19). They are also acknowledging they have more important things to do than try to get even with men who have wrongly accused them. They must spread the gospel and have churches to build. They will do their part and expect God to do His.

Our guarantee of deliverance is the resurrection of Jesus. The crucifixion, attitudes, and actions of the people do not take God by surprise. In His foreknowledge, God knew the action of the people would be against His plan of the cross (2:23). God did not ordain the opposition, but he did know it would happen and planned the resurrection around it. God knows of our problems and has a plan for each opposition (1 Corinthians 10:13). God uses the devices and plans of men to bring glory to Himself and deliverance to us (Romans 8:28).

A PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS

Act 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

this group of believers is in essence saying, “Lord, the heathen are at it again -- they are threatening us.” God promised deliverance by the mouth of David, and it is repeated throughout the Old Testament. In their own life-time, they have seen the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus out of the hands of evil men. Now, God will do it again. This occasion took God no more by surprise than any other, including the crucifixion of Jesus. Our attitude in prayer should simply be to bring the accusations of men before the Lord.

The believers in Jerusalem are doing what Hezekiah did when he faced an invasion by the Army of Sennacherib. Hezekiah spread the evil report written by the heathen king before the Lord (Isaiah 34: 14). The heathen were not bringing an evil report against the people; they were bringing an evil report against the Lord. Both Hezekiah and the congregation of Jerusalem were informing God of what was being spoken about Him. The congregation now asks God for boldness to speak His Word and the name of Jesus even more.

Act 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of the holy child (spotless humanity on) Jesus.

In addition to asking for boldness, they are asking God for signs and wonders to accompany the preaching of the Word (Mark 16:20). The “hand” of the Lord is the power of the Holy Spirit. This power will work through their hands because they are the body of Jesus in the earth. Their hands and mouths are really His. His words and power are displayed through them.

We have been given dominion over the works of Jesus’ hands (Psalm 8:6). Although healing comes through our hands, the power comes from God. We are only agents of God’s healing power.

Act 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with **boldness**.

There are results when true worship and adoration are given to God and His Son, Jesus (16:26). Here God answers their prayer with a wonder: He shakes the meeting place. God also answers their prayer for boldness: They are filled with the Holy Spirit. This group of believers must have gone from praying in a known tongue to praying and praising God in unknown tongues of the Holy Spirit.

4:31 boldness, *parrhesia* (par-rhay-see-ah); Outspokenness, unreserved utterance, freedom of speech, with frankness, candor, cheerful courage, and the opposite of cowardice, timidity, or fear. Here it denotes a divine enablement that comes to ordinary and unprofessional people exhibiting spiritual power and authority. It also refers to a clear presentation of the gospel without being ambiguous or unintelligible. *Parrhesia* is not a human quality but a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

ONE HEART

Act 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart (love) and of one soul (purpose): neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

Not Only Is This a Review of Acts 2:45, but also an introduction to Acts 5. Although all are said to be of one love and purpose toward each other and God, and exception will soon be found and Ananias and Sapphira.

Act 4:33 And with great **power** gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

And with great power (dunamis: inherent power) gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace (favor) was upon them all.

The power referred to is miracle power (1 Corinthians 12:10). The miracle received is semeion, which was found in verse 16. A miracle performed is dunamis, found in this verse. This verse also notes that miracles and signs are all witnessing (1:8). Each miracle proclaims that the primary reason Jesus was raised from the dead was to be our personal Savior. One of the benefits following a life of power and holiness is great grace or favor (2:47), which the disciples walked in.

„ **4:33 power**, *dunamis* (doo-nam-is); One of four great power words. The others are *exousai*, delegated authority; *ischuros*, great strength (especially physical); and *kratos* dominion authority. *Dunamis* means energy, power, might, great force, great ability, strength. It is sometimes used to describe the powers of the world to come at work up on the Earth and divine power overcoming all resistance. (Compare “dynamic,” “dynamite,” and “dynamometer.”) The *dunamis* in Jesus resulted in dramatic transformations. This is the norm for the Spirit-filled and Spirit-led church.

4:32-33 One Heart and One Soul, POWER OF UNITY. The early church grew rapidly as “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). In 4:32-33, it is reported that the growing multitude of believers were experiencing a profound dimension of spiritual unity. First, they were “of one heart,” which is a description in the original Greek, meaning “in tune” or “in sync” with one another. To put it another way, they were all going the same way, spiritually together. Second, they were of “one soul” (sometimes translated as “one mind”). This has a wonderfully deep meaning in the original Greek. It literally means “to breathe” or “to breathe spiritually together.” The results of this quality of spiritual unity were both powerful and practical: “they had all

things in common” (shared everything they had); they witnessed “with great power”; and “great grace was upon them all.” All of these glorious things took place through the unleashing of the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the corporate prayers of God’s people crying out to him together (verse 24).

POSSESSIONS POOLED (34-37)

Many of these first believers sold their land or homes so distribution could be made toward those in need, especially the widows. This giving was strictly voluntary on the part of the people. No one coerced them into doing so.

Act 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

The same thing will happen twice in the next chapter. Barnabas is one individual who will sell his land to give to the gospel and be blessed. He will be truthful with the people and the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira, however, will lie and receive judgment.

Act 4:35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

The giving of possessions is voluntary, and the people are free to participate or not participate. Many choose to pool their possessions, property, and finances because if they don’t “own” anything, the government can’t take it away. Part of the group who receives benefit from the common collection is the widows (6:1). The pooling of resources does not produce power, but it is an outward sign of the unity which the disciples already possess.

Act 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

And Joses (Joseph), who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

This is the beginning of the ministry of Barnabas:

1. He later became a prophet and teacher (13:1; 14:14).
2. He introduces Paul to the other apostles (9:25-27).
3. He began the church at Antioch (11:22-23).
4. He sent for Paul to teach the congregation (11:25-26).
5. He eventually became a pastor at Antioch and missed God through legalism (Galatians 2:13).
6. He finally became reconciled to Paul (1 Corinthians 9:6).

Act 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

The church at Jerusalem is the only church that operated in this manner. This does not give the church immunity to persecution or destruction. After Saul's conversion, the church at Jerusalem begins to define. Paul mentions later in the epistles (to Corinth and Philippi) the great needs at Jerusalem. Offerings will be given and distributed to them as a result. Thessalonica and Philippi will be great contributors to the saints in Jerusalem.