



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

## **Study 7: SPECTACULAR GROWTH DESPITE BITTER PERSECUTION**

### **Acts 4:1-37**

This is a great chapter, revealing the power and the fruits of Pentecost. The religious persecution was overcome by bold, Pentecostal power. This is a chapter of great contrasts; a chapter of great confrontation and great courage, great threats and great triumph, great persecution and great perseverance, great foes and great fearlessness, great battle and great boldness, great resistance and great revival, great conflict and great conversions, great secularism and great signs and wonders. The chapter begins with the anger of intolerant religionists but ends with prayer, power, consecration, love, fellowship, oneness and growth of the Church.

Both religious intolerance and political indignation came against the early Church. The plan of Satan, the Sadducees and Sanhedrin was to intimidate and silence the Apostles so as to weaken and eventually destroy the Church. These religious leaders who had crucified Jesus were angered by the preaching of His resurrection. Their doctrine, dogma, tradition, position and authority were being challenged and threatened by the Name of the risen, glorified Christ. The power and authority of ignorant and uneducated fishermen were gaining more public recognition than their dead orthodoxy. Their hypocrisy had suffered irrecoverable crash and they were not willing to repent. Since their religion did not have the weapon of prayer and appeal to God, they resorted to fighting with threats, force and intimidation. The Apostles stood on higher ground and overcame all opposition with prayer, power, preaching, perseverance, prevailing purpose, passion and purity of heart and life.

### **SAVING PROCLAMATION OF THE SAVIOUR'S RESURRECTION**

Acts 4:1-12; 10:39-43; 17:30,31; 26:8,19-23; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 23:6-9; 5:18; Matthew 21:42-45; Psalm 118:22,23; 1 Peter 2:6-8; Matthew 1:21; 1 Corinthians 3:11.

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the saving proclamation of the gospel. And that resurrection was the smiting stone on the Sadducees' religion. The resurrection of Christ had publicly disproved their false and powerless doctrine. Rather than repent when they were confronted with the power of the risen Christ, they reacted with persecution and spearheaded the fatal national rejection of Christ. Their hatred of Christ's name and resurrection hindered the nation's salvation and led multitudes to a doomed, damned eternity.

The story of the undeniable healing of the forty-year old man who was born lame rang through Jerusalem. The miracle and the message that followed brought thousands to salvation in Christ. These religious temple liberals did not share in the joy of salvation; hatred and hypocrisy blinded their eyes from seeing the goodness and grace of God. They arrested and locked up the Apostles. The following day, they brought them before the council and questioned them to know by what name, power or authority the miracle was performed. A Scripture-based answer, a Spirit-taught answer, a heaven-sent answer came forth from the inspired Apostle but they were too blind to see, too deaf to hear. The hatred in their spirit hindered them from receiving the healing of their soul. Prophecy was fulfilled in them. They were builders who had rejected the chief cornerstone. They rejected the only Name, the Name of Jesus, by which any man in any generation could be saved. They shut the door of heaven against themselves. Flee the camp of the Sadducees today. Come to Christ, the only Saviour. Let not hatred and hypocrisy seal your doom in hell. Repent, believe in Christ as your only Saviour and be saved.

### **STEADFAST PERSEVERANCE AMIDST STIFF RESISTANCE**

Acts 4:13-22; 5:27-32,40-42; Jeremiah 1:7,17-19 ; 26:12-15; Ezekiel 3:11,14-21; Daniel 3:13-18; 6:1-10; Hebrews 11:24-27; Acts 14:21-23; 20:22-28; 2 Timothy 3:12-17; Revelation 2:8-11.

Perseverance in persecution, steadfastness in suffering, courage in crisis, fearlessness before fierce, formidable foes, devotion and dedication in times of danger characterized the Apostles. Indeed, steadfast perseverance during severe persecution was the distinguishing mark of all true Christians.

Everything around them should have overwhelmed and crushed the spirit of these ministers of the gospel but they stood courageously before the intimidating council as unconquerable ambassadors from the courts of heaven.

The enemies of resurrection and righteousness took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. It's more than that. They had been with Jesus, they had received from Jesus, they had been baptized and empowered by Jesus, they had died and risen with Jesus, they had conquered with Jesus. The power upon them, the purity within them, His presence with them, the protection around them, the pillar behind them, all principalities under

them and Paradise before them made them as bold as a lion, more than conquerors. The threats were empty and shallow; nothing could frighten the Apostles anymore. They had received the Holy Ghost and they were seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Be filled with the Spirit and you will possess such holy boldness which will render persecutors insignificant and their persecution ineffective.

## SCRIPTURAL PRAYING WITH SPECTACULAR RESULTS

Acts 4:23-37; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; Luke 18:1-8; Psalm 2:1-8; Luke 24:44-46; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Ephesians 6:18-20; 2 Timothy 4:17,18; Isaiah 65:24; John 15:7; 16:23,24; 1 John 3:21-24.

The whole Church prayed with one accord. In their prayer they said, "**Lord, Thou art God**". The persecutors were mere men but the Lord is "**God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is**". Recognizing the Omnipotence of God reduces persecutors and persecution to nothing. God holds all the forces of nature, all the factors of space, matter and time, all the possibilities and eventualities of the universe in His Hands and under His control. They also quoted Psalm 2 in their prayer and reassured themselves of the Omniscience of God. Nothing takes God by surprise. He knew all things beforehand. Neither the plot of the past nor the persecution of the present could derail or destroy God's plan.

They prayed for boldness to preach and power to heal and confirm the Word with signs and wonders. Their prayer received immediate response and the Church remained strong, faithful and unconquerable. The Holy Spirit filled them with power and the place of prayer was shaken. The shaking of that house was symbolic of the shaking that would take place in the house of Israel. The Church became mighty and old ideas, traditions, sacrifices, ceremonies, systems and religious structures in Israel were shaken to the very foundation by the powerful and irresistible proclamation of the name of Jesus. Great grace and great power was upon the whole Church and the gates of hell could not prevail against the Church.

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