

PP Acts: To the End of the Earth

Part 7-Acts 4 *In the face of Persecution*

11/14-15/2020

Tim Snediker, a teaching assistant and doctoral student in the department of religious studies at University of California at Santa Barbara was asked, *'If you were dropped 2000 years back in time with nothing but the knowledge you have now, what would you do?'* His answer was, *'I would find and assassinate Jesus of Nazareth'*

At Kent State saying, *"You Need Jesus"* is under consideration as hate speech

Jeannine Hill Fletcher, a professor of theology at Fordham University claims that the Christian doctrine of salvation is racist

Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts issued a warning that Christians commit microaggressions by saying 'Merry Christmas', 'Happy Easter' and 'God bless you'¹

Yet the more the church is persecuted and oppressed, the more powerful her witness of Jesus

PP *"One of the greatest paradoxes in Christian history is that the church is most pure in times of cultural hostility...when the church encounters hardship, persecution, and suffering...then*

there are fewer hypocrites and nominal believers among its members, and then the faith of Christians burns most intensely." Edward Veith

As we look at Acts 4, we will learn how to witness even in the face of persecution

PP 1-Prepare your mind for persecution

It didn't take long for opposition and persecution to rear up against the church

"And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening." Ac 4:1-3

There were 24 divisions of priests, each one serving in the Temple for one week, twice a year

Most of the priests didn't live in Jerusalem, coming in to the city for each week of their service

When they did serve, they counted that week the most blessed part of their year

Likely annoyed at the interruption of their services, the priests, along with the chief of police, the right hand man of the high priest, came to arrest them

Alongside were some Sadducees, a small, but wealthy and powerful religious/political group

'Sadducees' did not believe in the resurrection from the dead and taught that angels and spirits and the spirit world were myths

They believed man was the master of their own destiny, that God was not involved in calling the shots, no such thing as a sovereign God working out all things according to His purposes

These are like our modern liberal professors that teach at religious universities

This group ***'came upon them'*** which in the Greek is much stronger than in English

Fast and furious, a grab and go, and the next thing Peter and John knew, they were in custody

The reason why was ***"because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead"*** 4:2

Jesus had prepared them: **PP** ***"A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted***

¹ <https://ischristianitytrue.wordpress.com/2020/10/02/the-persecution-of-christians-on-campus/>

Me, they will also persecute you.” John 15:20

Paul would later write, **PP** *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” 2 Timothy 3:12-13*

Peter would soon write, **PP** *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” 1 Peter 5:12*

He learned this lesson in Acts 4 where the first persecution of the church occurred

Prepare your minds now brothers and sisters, persecution will come as you witness of Jesus

PP 2-Pin your confidence to the promise

Because it was already evening, and night trials were illegal, they put them in jail overnight

“On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’” 4:5-7

The Sanhedrin gathered, made of 71 powerful, wealthy elite, all led by the High Priest

Before the Roman occupation, a high priest held the office for life, but now Rome appointed the person, and it went to the highest bidder and greatest collaborator with Rome

It took a greedy, wealthy sellout to Rome to become High Priest, hated by the Jewish people

Annas occupied the office from A.D. 6-14, and had been replaced by 5 of his sons, with his son in law Caiaphas the current High Priest, but Annas was the true figurehead behind him

He had used his immense wealth to ensure his dynasty, wealth gained through what were called, the ‘Bazaars of Annas’...stalls for changing money and selling sacrificial animals that were set up in the Court of Gentiles in the Temple

Almost no animal was declared worthy of sacrifice other than the costly ones sold at these stalls

Peter and John along with the healed beggar (4:14) are brought before them to be interrogated

Now don’t miss what Luke tells us next, for it is the greatest encouragement for all Christians!

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...” 4:8

The phrase ***‘filled with the Holy Spirit’*** occurs repeatedly in the book of Acts and to many, it is connected to speaking in tongues, or healing the sick, or a deep, powerful worship

The truth is, being filled with the Holy Spirit is always connected in Acts to witnessing of Jesus

Was this not the promise Jesus gave them just weeks before?: ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8***

The Spirit’s filling happens in an ongoing way, according to **Ephesians 5:18**, and it does so as a Christian walks with the Spirit in loving obedience to Jesus in His Word

And when He fills us, we will have a greater confidence in God’s Word, an greater desire to make much of Jesus, a greater boldness and a greater power in our witnessing of Jesus

We must pin our hope to the promise of Jesus: *The filling of the Spirit will empower us to witness of Jesus, even in the most hostile and dangerous situations*

PP 3-Point your audience to one Plan

We now come to the point where the heat of persecution turns up...fast!

The Sanhedrin asked them, ***“By what power or by what name (authority) did you do this?” 4:7***
 Can’t you picture the Apostles smiling, and saying, *‘I’m glad you asked!’*?

The Sanhedrin didn’t realize it, but God was opening a door for the gospel, as Paul later taught

PP ***“At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.” Colossian 4:3-4***

Friends, are you able to see open doors in your life, opportunities God is giving you to witness? As you pray throughout the day, eyes open and mind alert, you will see them more and more. You will not need to try to force one open, God will do that work of getting someone ready, and even if they do not respond favorably, it was still a divine appointment.

Peter said, ***“let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” 4:10-12***

Nothing angers this world system more than the exclusive claims of the gospel...that there is one way to be saved, and that through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Years ago a man whom we had considered asking to be an Elder, sat in my office and told me that with his travels around the world, observing different religions and worshipers, he no longer believed that Christianity was the only correct religion.

What he expressed is called pluralism or relativism, and it dominates American religious thought. It goes like this: *We all get on different paths, but they all lead to the same place.*

Yet Jesus said, **PP** ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6***

This is the exclusive claim of the gospel so Christians, have no fear, do not compromise the gospel...proclaim it with courage and confidence!

PP 4-Proclaim your testimony with God’s permission

The Jewish rulers could not refute the miracle of this healed man standing before them, so they resorted to what the world always does...power and intimidation.

They sent the Apostles out and ***‘conferred with one another’ 4:15***

They finally agreed that ***‘in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name. So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.’ 4:17-18***

‘when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them’ 21

Now listen to what these Spirit-filled Apostles said in the face of these threats: ***“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” 4:19-20***

Friends, it is always right in the sight of God to speak of what you have seen and heard.

You have permission, so let that good news be too good to keep to yourself.

Here is one thing you will never be able to do in heaven...witness of Jesus to an unbeliever.

So go, be filled, and witness of Jesus Christ, and make friends for eternity.

If you desire to live a godly life, and witness of Jesus Christ, you will be persecuted.

So, **PP** *Prepare your mind for persecution*

Pin your confidence to the promise of the Holy Spirit to fill you and empower you to witness

Point your audience to one plan, Jesus Christ, for there is no other way to be saved

Proclaim your testimony, you have *God's permission* and with that permission, His power!

Amen?

Pray