

## Ministering Amidst Opposition (Acts 4:23-31)<sup>a</sup>

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### Context

1. **Acts 3** - Peter and John healed a man, at the age of over 40, who had been lame from birth (Acts 4:22).
2. Through the witness of the miraculous healing and Peter's subsequent preaching, many came to faith.
3. Peter and John were arrested by the religious leaders, examined, and told not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.
4. Today's passage describes the reaction of the early church following the release of Peter and John.

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### Today's Passage<sup>1</sup>

- Acts 4:23 - *And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.*
- Acts 4:24 - *So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,*
- Acts 4:25 - *"who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: "Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things?*
- Acts 4:26 - *The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.'*
- Acts 4:27 - *"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together*
- Acts 4:28 - *"to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.*
- Acts 4:29 - *"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,*
- Acts 4:30 - *"by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."*
- Acts 4:31 - *And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*

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### The ups and downs of serving God

1. **Historically**
  - A. **Countries wax strong through revival and increased commitment to God.**
    - I. **For a time, they serve as powerful spiritual forces carrying His banner**
    - II. **For a time, they are the primary sources of global missionary movements**
    - III. **For a time, they foster learning and advancement of the knowledge of God's word by fostering Christian educational institutions and publishing.**

**IV. The gain great blessings, become the head rather than the tail in relation to other nations (Deu. 28:13)**

**B. Countries wane in their service to God**

**I. Fade as Christianity accommodates the culture**

**II. Loss of spiritual power and fervor**

**III. Focus on social causes rather than the Biblical priority of redemption and personal transformation**

**IV. Like Israel of old, they forget who they are and where they came from**

**V. Lose the once-great blessings, become the tail rather than the head in relation to other nations (Deu. 28:44)**

**C. Lack of time, but examples of this pattern—in various stages—abound: Switzerland, Germany, England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, USA, South Korea**

**2. Personally**

**A. Times of exciting results and great transformation, ministry effectiveness and zeal**

**B. Our initial conversion, excitement about learning God's Word, soaking up everything and anything from various teaching sources God blesses us with**

**C. Times where nothing much seems to be happening, times of great spiritual and cultural opposition**

**D. Attempting to motivate in the midst of lethargy and distraction**

**E. Ministering in the midst of a minimal Christianity which is content with religious ritual, willing to cough up a few token hours on Sunday, but ultimately comfortable enough to run with the world the rest of the week.**

**F. Swimming upstream in a powerful cultural river which, despite our best efforts, is steadily carrying society downstream towards a steep waterfall**

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**The experience of the early church (so far)**

**1. Early successes**

**A. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost**

**B. The miracle of speaking in unlearned languages**

**C. Peter's first sermon (Acts 2:14-39), resulting in thousands responding in faith (Acts 2:41)**

**D. Signs and wonders performed by the Apostles (Acts 2:43)**

E. Rich, communal fellowship among believers (Acts 4:42-46)

F. Continual conversions as the church grows (Acts 2:47)

G. Peter and John heal the lame man, *even in the temple*

H. Response of the common people:

I. *all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed (Acts 3:11).*

II. *many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand (Acts 4:4).*

I. A tidal wave of conversion and ministry success was underway . . . they were on a roll!

## 2. Resolute opposition of the established powers

### A. Undeniable healing

I. A man born lame—who had *never, ever* walked

II. Known in the community for decades

III. Familiar to the religious leaders. He was *carried . . . laid daily at the gate of the temple* (Acts 3:2).

IV. *seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it* (Acts 4:14).

V. They themselves remark, . . . *indeed, a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it* (Acts 4:16).

B. Religious leaders threatened them, sought to punish them, *for a good deed done to a helpless man* (Acts 4:9) and explaining how the man came to be healed.

C. Thus is the illogical, but very real, spiritual opposition which characterizes the kingdom of darkness.

## 3. The appeal of the early church to God (in prayer)

A. Recognizing His sovereignty: *Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them* (Acts 4:24).

I. Because all things find their ultimate origin in Him, nothing transpires which, ultimately, is not allowed by Him.

II. God is not the *author* of sin, but sin cannot thwart His ultimate purposes in history. Thus, opposing God's will is ultimately vanity.

B. Understanding their recent experience in accord with the prophesied global opposition of God by the nations: an ongoing pattern which would characterize history as described within

**Psalm 2. (Acts 2:25-26)**

- I. **Why did [do] the nations rage. . . the people plot vain things?** (Acts 2:25 cf. Ps. 2:1).
- II. **Their motivation: saying *Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us*** (Ps. 2:3).
  - a. **It's not about lack of evidence and sincere seekers who can't find Him.**
  - b. **It's about a hardened heart which is unwilling to come to Him—at any cost.**
    - i. Jesus said, *The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come* (Mat. 22:2-3).
    - ii. Again, Jesus said, . . . *you do not have [God's] word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life* (John 5:38-40).
- III. **Ultimate fulfillment in the millennial kingdom**
  - a. ***Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion*. (Ps. 2:6) - this speaks of Jesus' literal reign from Jerusalem following upon His Second Coming.**
  - b. **The final rebellion against God, even after He has been reigning personally in their midst for 1,000 years, as recorded in Revelation 20:7-10. Some still reject Him!**
- IV. **Overthrowing God's ultimate plan is impossible, vanity, even insanity: *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision*** (Ps. 2:4).
- V. **Yet, make no mistake Christian, you will experience the sad truth of this Psalm in your own ministry!**

**C. Grasping God's sovereignty is the foundation for steadfast ministry.**

- I. **As difficult to understand as it might be, the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus and their more recent experience before the religious leaders was in accord with God's sovereign plan for history.**
  - Acts 4:27 - *"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together*
  - Acts 4:28 - *"to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.*
- a. **Jesus was God's Holy Servant, anointed [authorized, approved, commissioned] by God.**
- b. **Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews gathered to oppose the Very One approved and authorized by God.**
- c. **What they did, in their ignorance and opposition to God, turned out to be according to God's Own hand and purpose—as determined before it all went down.**

**D. Petition for boldness: Acts 4:29 - "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,**

**I. Bringing the situation before God for His response**

- a. **God's job: *Lord, look on their threats* - it is His duty to take note and respond to opposition. It is opposition to Him, not just us!**
- b. **Our part: *Grant . . . boldness . . . [to] speak your word* — remain faithful to our job, our post in the army.**

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## Summary

1. **Avoiding an up-and-then-down, "see-saw" experience in our Christian walk.**
2. **Understanding our calling and position. We are called out from the world, we will be opposed by the world (John 15:18-20).**
3. **Some believers will live in "Noah-like" times and places: ministering in an age and to a culture characterized by apostasy. What kind of staying power will they require? How will they stand over the long-haul in the face of the disappointments?**
  - A. **Learning to evaluate ministry according to Scriptural principles and priorities. Popularity seldom characterizes the work of God.**
  - B. **The gate to life is not only *narrow*, it is also *difficult*: . . . *narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it* (Mat. 7:14).**
  - C. **Expect difficulty and rejection: this is the norm. If God does otherwise in your ministry, rejoice —but don't grow to expect it or depend upon it for motivation!**
4. **View opposition and seeming ineffectiveness as validation of the Biblical worldview: we are in a war—it *never* takes a vacation.**
5. **Our perspective must extend beyond ourselves as individuals. We must see our ministry:**
  - A. **from the perspective of the Bible — what does Scripture say to expect and to be concerned with?**
  - B. **from the perspective of our place in Christian history — how do we fit into our time and place in God's long-term plan reconciling individuals to Himself?**

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## Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 4:23-31](#)
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## Sources:

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**Links Mentioned Above**

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/17\\_Acts\\_4\\_23-31/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/17_Acts_4_23-31/index.htm).  
b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.  
c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.