

Moving Through Opposition - Acts 4:1-31

So we are taking a majority of this year and journeying through the book of Acts, in a series we are calling Church On The Move. We are going to be in Acts chapter 4, so go ahead and grab your Bibles or Bible apps and turn there, or grab a Bible in front of you, if you don't have one.

We have seen the church go from a few people to thousands of people, and then last week we began to see how the church went about Jerusalem and was a movement of hope. People are being healed, the message of Jesus is being spread, things are going great.

After a season of "things going great" what usually happens? Things don't go so great, you hit a bump or a pothole, an open door is suddenly slammed shut, a friendship blows up, or an issue becomes unresolvable. Trouble comes, opposition happens. In fact Jesus said, "In this life you will have trouble, you will face opposition."

If you remember, last week in Acts 3, Peter and John healed a man who was crippled since birth, and everyone was astounded at seeing this man walk and leap around. Then Peter begins to explain that it's not them that did this, but it was their faith in Jesus. So Peter and John are still speaking when we get to chapter 4.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, **2** greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.**3** And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. **4** But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

First thing that I see is that, hey we got trouble, right here in River City! The religious leaders conspire together and have Peter and John arrested for the evening. Jesus said you are going to have trouble! He knew what he was talking about. Here is what we need to realize is that this trouble is not just for Peter and John...but it is for all who call Jesus savior and lord!

Opposition will come. If you are a follower of Jesus today you probably know what I am talking about. But maybe you don't. Opposition will come, it is not a question of if, it is a question of when.

- A person accepts Jesus and is baptized, comes home all excited and free only to find their family ridicules them for a faith they don't understand or don't want to understand. - That's opposition
- A Christian stands up for what they believe in a secular work place only to find themselves on the end of a lawsuit. - That's opposition.
- A church is burned to the ground and it's members are marched to prison or shot on the spot. - That's opposition. You might ask does that happen...absolutely, to Christian bothers and sisters around the globe.

In the US, I think we get confused on what opposition is. Sometimes we think opposition is a disagreement, or its questioning, or its critique. I can disagree with you, or question you, or even critique you and it come from a place of finding compromise or finding mutual understanding. A good relationship is comprised of two people who can have hard conversations and ask tough questions and still love each other in the end.

Last night we were getting ready to go out for dinner and Liza, my three year old wanted to wear her princess Elsa dress to dinner...some battles aren't worth fighting so we let her, but then she wanted to wear her princess shoes without socks...I said no you need to wear your socks and boots, its too cold! I tried to say that princess Elsa when she walks in the snow, she wears her boots...she replied, "No daddy, I saw the movie, she had her princess shoes on." I

was just out reasoned by a three year old. Finally I resorted to the old standby...because I said so!

But opposition at least from a Biblical perspective is spiritual in nature. Evil in a cosmic battle with good. Satan and his demons fighting against Jesus and the angel armies for the souls of humanity. And this cosmic battle often rears its ugly head as opposition that we might face in our lives.

Opposition will come, but don't be discouraged because Jesus has already won the war through the cross. Jesus says, in this world you will have trouble, but take heart for I have already overcome the world.

We see a glimpse of this in verse 4, in the midst of this opposition that Peter and John were facing, many of those who were listening to John and Peter believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. So if you were to add women and children to that number, the church in Jerusalem is now at 10,000 plus. This is tremendous growth. Throughout church history the church has seen its greatest growth in the midst of opposition and oppression. Because it is in those times we learn to depend on Jesus alone!

So the next morning Peter and John are brought out before the religious leaders to be questioned. Look at what Peter says in verse 11-12, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. **12** 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."

That reminds me of what Jesus said to his disciples in John 14 **6** Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Those are pretty exclusive claims that are made about Jesus and by Jesus. When you start making those claims today what happens? Opposition happens.

Remember two weeks ago we talked about Generation X and how that generation was the first to say, "It's true for you but not for me." Because of that thought, which is so deeply embedded into our society are living in a Post Christian society, that means that Christianity is no longer the religion of the nation...It is now one of many religions and philosophies. Another way of saying it is that we live in a pluralistic society. That's a graduate school term. **Pluralism is a theory that there is more than one kind of ultimate reality.** So the message of the church is that:

- Jesus is the way the truth and the life...well that is your truth and not mine.
- Salvation is found in no other name of Jesus...true for you but not for me.

The truth of Jesus either makes converts or it makes enemies. There is no middle ground.

Last May, The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom just released its 2018 Annual Report noting that religious freedom is in global decline. "Sadly, religious freedom conditions deteriorated in many countries in 2017, often due to increasing authoritarianism or under the guise of countering terrorism," said Chairman Daniel Mark.

Opposition will come. But notice what happens to Peter and John, start with verse 13. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

I love that. The religious leaders were astonished by the boldness of these uneducated, common people. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. Right there is the key to

all of this. If opposition will come how do we prepare? Spend time with Jesus! Jesus can take uneducated common folk and give them boldness. Jesus can take a Putnam County hoosier and give him/her courage to face the storm!

So the religious leaders talk a little more amongst themselves and they come up with a plan. Look at verses 18-20, **So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."**

Opposition will always seek to silence the message of Jesus. The powers of evil in this world know that it's in Jesus where true freedom is found. So if you are a follower of Jesus are you ready for opposition? Opposition will come. Will you be silenced or will you be like Peter and John and boldly declare; "I have been with Jesus, I can only speak of that which I have seen and heard!"

So Peter and John are released and they go back to their friends and report what had just happened to them. Then they begin to pray, and I want you to see something in their prayer. They had just done a very bold thing in front of the religious leaders, but now look...verses 29-30. **29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."**

They pray for more boldness, more courage! Isn't it human to be incredibly courageous and bold in one circumstance and then at the next situation that arises, you can easily doubt and let fear set in? **There have been some Sundays when I have felt a boldness as I preach and I know that it is connecting with people...and yet a few days later fear and discouragement creep in. And it's happened enough that I recognize it's spiritual, Satan wants to keep people discouraged.** So we pray for boldness, we pray for courage.

Peter is one of the best to learn from, when talking about courage. Peter knew what it was like to face opposition, to say something in anger he wish he could take back, to draw back in fear, to be restored in love, then to step out boldly with gospel courage. It took him years to learn, but with Jesus beside him and the Spirit within him, he did. Later in life, he wrote a letter—1 Peter—to fellow sufferers, and taught them how to respond as a Christian to opposition.

Using **Courage** as an acronym let's look at some practical advice Peter gives us as we respond to opposition. The first thing Peter tells us is to stay **cool , calm, and collected!** Look at **1 Peter 3:14, But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.**

Some Christians today are angry, we see it spew out on social media or in emails or in meetings. An outraged Christian is a sad sight and a bad example. Respond to opposition with grace and truth. The words "outrage" and "courage" both have the word "rage" in them. Yet they're totally different attitudes. We need less reactionary outrage and more courageous love. Before you send it, post it or say it...wait and calm down and don't react!

The second is to **Own Your Junk.** **1 Peter 4:15, 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.**

Sometimes the world sees the worst of Christians. Sometimes those who are against us see our failures more clearly that we do. If we are racist, then we need to repent. If we hate gay

people, we need to repent. If we are rude and arrogant and gossipy at work, and a coworker calls us out, don't get offended...repent. Own up to our junk, own our sins and repent. Jesus is an expert at dealing with our junk...give it to him. And if the unbelieving world sees you do this and you are humble about it...that speaks volumes!

The third is to have **Unconditional Love**. He says in **1 Peter 3:9**, **Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.**

In opposition, our battle isn't against people, it's never us verses them. Jesus is ultimately for everybody. The best way to imitate Christ is to love those who wrong you and oppose you. To unconditionally love your enemies, means treating others like Jesus has done to you.

The fourth is to **Rely on God and do good**. 1 Peter 4:19 says, **Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.**

Keep doing what God is wanting you to do. Keep serving each person you meet. Keep loving everyone who crosses your path. Don't try to silence opposition by yelling louder. Trust God and do what's right. Your actions are often the loudest voice in the room. As you follow Jesus' example, he will take care of you.

The fifth is to **Articulate your belief**. Peter says in **1 Peter 3:15**, **but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;**

In this world, if you live out grace and truth and love and integrity and hospitality and genuine love and kindness, people are going to ask...what is wrong with you?! We need to be ready to answer people's questions about why we believe what we believe. We have this captivating hope and we need to be ready to share it.

The sixth is to have **Gentle Actions**. 1 Peter 3:15 says, **but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,**

Sharing your faith sometimes means difficult conversations, but we should never be difficult people. Don't get in a verbal fight, always be gentle in word and action. If you are rude at sharing your faith you are bad at sharing your faith!

The final is that **Encouragement comes from company**. Peter says in **1 Peter 5:9**, **Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.**

We're not the first ones, the last ones, the only ones, or the main ones who are suffering. In the US, most of our minor opposition would barely register among so many brothers and sisters abroad. We should prayerfully remember with sympathy, the scores of others who endure so much more opposition than we do. When we face legitimate challenges to our faith, we're in good company.

So we pray to Jesus for courage for the opposition that will come. And we remember that there is coming a time when Jesus will return in an amazing display that is brighter than the rising of the sun. That day truth will reign and opposition will be thwarted. Until then we wait with hope and pray for courage to face whatever comes.