

# **“BY WHAT POWER DO YOU DO THIS?”**

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**Scripture Texts: Acts 4:1-12**

## **Introduction.**

Have you ever done something good and had it backfire? Have you ever done a good deed, some act of kindness, been extra generous, selfless, and had it turn out badly? Maybe you loaned something it came back damaged or broken, you gave some money and never got repaid. Or maybe you just got ingratitude in return, no appreciation or thanks.

Have you ever done what is right and suffered as a result? Have you ever had a negative outcome from a positive intention?

Some cynical people would say no good deed goes unpunished.

One day Peter and John were walking through the temple to a prayer gathering and they saw a crippled man, they offered healing to him in the name of Jesus. And they end up in prison.

Scripture teaches that the reward for doing good and for pursuing godliness and for living in a Christ-like manner is not fame and fortune and popularity, but persecution. Our allegiance to a suffering Christ will result in suffering.

**As they were speaking, vss. 1-4.**

***First***, whenever the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ shines bright, Satan is right there to try to extinguish the flame. At the earliest beginnings of every good work of God, Satan has been there to disrupt and destroy.

In the Garden of Eden, as Israel was entering the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, as soon as Jesus was born Satan incited Herod to kill the little boys in Bethlehem, and again when Jesus entered into ministry Satan came tempting.

Now here in chapter 4, at the beginning of the early church the resistance and hostility begins, Satan is right there. What starts in chapter 4 continues unabated in every chapter but three in Acts, and that's not the end of it. For twenty one centuries there has not been one day without it. It is true here in our own church and every other church that is faithful to God's Word.

We will be wise to pay close attention to this chapter of Acts. This is the first of several imprisonments and the last chapter of Acts ends with Paul in prison.

"As they spoke," the wicked were watching and lying in wait to seek an opportunity. Notice how quickly the priests and Sadducees and captain of the temple police force came to try to put out this fire.

We have an enemy of our souls, an enemy of this church, an enemy of every sermon preached here and of every good deed done here, an enemy of all our relationships. Are we wise and discerning and on guard and prepared to do battle?

Christians will sometimes say they wish we could go back to the book of Acts. They say this with some idyllic or romantic notion of the young church growing and vibrant, seeing miracles and many conversions. They forget about the hostility and persecution and hardships. They forget the words of Jesus.

**John 15:20** A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

**II Timothy 3:12** All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

**Acts 14:22** [Paul traveled through Asia Minor] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Wherever the Gospel is being proclaimed or lived out, wherever the truth of God's Word and Biblical morality is being held up as a standard, Satan will try everything to hinder it.

Let us take to heart the faithful witness and steadfast courage of the disciples. Let us push through our fears and doubts and anxiety.

Let us learn to stand for our faith and not be ashamed of our belief in Jesus. We must be willing to go against the grain of our culture. We must die to respectability and compromise and lukewarmness, to betraying Christ.

We need to give more thought to how Satan tries to undermine our Christian marriages and our Christian parenting and our Christian witness and our Christian church, sowing seeds of discontent and bitterness and ill-will and obstacles and opposition and deception and miscommunication and gossip and lies.

You know Satan is the master of disguises, he never shows up in a red suit with a tail and horns and a pitch fork. That would be dumb, we could see that coming a mile away. He wants you to think your enemy is your spouse or your best friend, your neighbor or fellow church member, your co-worker or the person who is making your life difficult.

I remind married couples who are in some big conflict your spouse is not your enemy, the enemy is the enemy, and the sooner the two of you realize it and get on the same team and fight the real enemy the sooner you will find peace. Satan uses our sin to get us to turn on each other.

Learn to recognize him and resist him. Rebuke him, tell him to get behind you. Pray deliver us from evil and the evil one.

Take comfort and courage that God is sovereign and will bring about His good through our faithfulness.

***Second***, notice that every effort of Satan is ruled and over ruled by God. Nothing hinders the work of God and in fact God turns every work of Satan to God's advantage. God continues to build His kingdom and to see that the Gospel of His Son is spread.

The apostles are in prison but what happens? The number of believers grew to five thousand men in spite of the opposition. The effect of the preaching of the Word of God accomplishes the purposes for which God sent it out. Satan put the bodies in bondage, but He cannot bind the Spirit of God and the Word of God. The Word of God has more power than the sword and all the armies of the world. The worst opposition of man has no effect on hindering the Word of God.

In fact, opposition and persecution are part of God's design, essential to His plan for His kingdom on earth. Remember history is His story, so what happens in history is part of God's design. In the church of Jesus Christ suffering is essential to God's larger plan and purpose, it is essential to the churches spiritual and physical growth.

The church of Jesus Christ must spread, and in order to spread it must be scattered, it must be pushed out of its comfort zones.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). They can hide it, attack it, persecute it, denigrate it, mock it, burn it, lock it up, even murder it—but all to no avail ... those words of Christ have not, cannot and will not passed away.

### **By what power or in whose name, vss. 5-7.**

This is an intimidating scene. Think of the Supreme Court justices except instead of 9 picture 71, all arrayed in their robes sitting up on a mahogany bench, surrounded by elders, scribes, lawyers all looking down on two uneducated red necks from Arkansas wearing coveralls.

The last time there was a gathering like this involving one of this little band of brothers someone got crucified.

The Sadducees weren't just a religious group, but also a political party that was willing to cooperate with the Romans. They were rich and powerful and opportunists. They controlled Jewish political and religious life.

“By what authority or in whose name are you acting? Who gave you permission? This is our temple, we have authority here, we decide what happens here, by what authority do you do this?”

They were acting out of a jealous fear of their own authority and out of a hatred of the pure and true doctrine of God.

The Sadducees are specifically mentioned because they hated and opposed the doctrine of a resurrection or an afterlife. They were secular humanist, denying the supernatural, denying the resurrection, denying the existence of angels and evil spirits. This is why they were particularly annoyed with the apostles preaching

about Jesus. Jesus was dead, he was yesterday's news. This Jesus they tried to get rid of just won't go away.

Think about this for a moment. Here is a political and religious party that has over time gained a position of high authority in the temple life of the Jews and they deny one of the central doctrines of the OT, that there is an eternal life after this one.

This is Satan's work, always tearing down and watering down and getting us to compromise on truth until there isn't any left. This is the path of every denomination, the slow wearing down and eroding of the truth of God's Word. And it always starts at the top.

How is it that those who hold the highest positions in Christ's church have come to reject Christ and His pure doctrines, but it has been happening for 2000 years and it is still happening, not just in our denomination but in every denomination in our country. Satan never stops.

Back in my days in the Presbyterian Church, that denomination maintained an office that conducted statistical analysis. They would send out surveys several times a year on a variety of social, moral, political and spiritual issues and then release the results.

Every time the results were completely predictable. On every issue the graph would move from conservative to liberal, starting with the pew, then the elders and deacons, then the pastors, then the professors, then the staff at headquarters. The pew was always the most orthodox, the most in line with God's Word, yet the pew didn't hold their leaders accountable for what they believed and taught.

Don't underestimate your knowledge of what is true and right just because some educated types in high positions say you are ignorant or wrong. Who would you rather have as a pastor, Caiaphas or Peter?

Intellectuals reject Christianity in huge numbers. Our universities are filled with atheists. They are too smart to fall for supernatural nonsense. Christ crucified was a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Greeks, and He still is today to the rich and powerful and intellectuals.

Peter and John were facing legal intimidation. Just like happens all over the world and it is happening in our own country.

We live in a world that is increasingly hostile to the Gospel. A modern day inquisition is increasing in our country, especially in the academic world, politics, media, arts and entertainment. If we don't fall in line with the secular humanist agenda, we are in trouble.

You will bake the cake, you will use the proper non-gender pronoun, and you will never say out loud what Planned Parenthood does or what sexual activity is immoral.

But what does this have to do with us here in Lynden? Pray for wisdom to discern where Satan is undermining the truth of God's Word in your life and where he is trying to silence your voice. Don't fall for everything you read in the newspaper or the Banner.

Prepare your kids as they start school this week. They will experience test and challenges and temptations, temptations to lie, cheat, compromise. Temptations in peer pressure, temptations in social media. In your family prayers, pray for God's wisdom and protection. Don't be naïve, there is a war going on with a real enemy, but we are on the side of victory in Christ.

Peter learned from his experiences and used it to strengthen our faith when he wrote his letters.

**I Peter 4:12-19** 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. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

16 If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Glory is gained no other way. Jesus entered heaven with scars and so must we.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, send your Spirit upon us I pray and grant us a glimpse of the glory that awaits as we patiently bear these light and momentary trials in this life. Enable us to trust our souls to our faithful Savior who suffered and died, not so we wouldn't have to, but so that our suffering might be redemptive and fruitful and lead to glory.