

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT IN PERSECUTION: VICTORY OVER ABUSE ACTS 04:23–31

Introduction

The true believer shall suffer persecution. Christ said so (see Jn. 15:20). Christ suffered persecution; the early church suffered persecution; believers today shall suffer persecution. It is inevitable.

=> It may take the form of abuse, anger, slander, gossip, mockery, cursing, isolation or violence.

=> It may take place in the market place, church, home, community or school.

What believers need is not deliverance from persecution, but victory and triumph over it. Believers need a conviction of mission, a conviction so strong that they become immovable.

I. Peter and John were released (vv. 23-24).

II. A conviction of God's power (v. 24).

III. A conviction of man's futility and God's plan or providence (vv. 25-28).

IV. A conviction of mission and of God's concern (vv. 29-30).

V. The results (v. 31).

I. Acts 04:23–24 Two Humble Ministers

Peter and John were released. As soon as they were released, they sought out their fellow believers, the church. Most likely the church was already meeting together, praying for Peter and John.

1. They reported and shared their experience with the church. Note several striking facts.
 - a. Peter and John were not depressed, discouraged or downcast. Neither were they stricken with fear and trembling. They were not suggesting the church withdraw into a hole and keep its message to itself. They had been imprisoned and tried by the Supreme Court itself, threatened and warned, but they were not defeated and silenced.
 - b. Peter and John were not puffed up. They had suffered undue strain and pressure in serving Christ, and God had marvellously used them as witnesses to the highest rulers of the land. Yet there is no mention, no suggestion, not even a tinge...
 - of boasting
 - of being God's special servants
 - of being more used by God
 - of self-glorying
 - of conceit
 - of being exalted above fellow believers
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- c. The concern of Peter and John was to encourage and edify (build up) the church and to warn them of the coming persecution that lay over the horizon. Note the words “reported all.” They shared all that the court had said: their questioning, their threats, their warnings. They shared how persecution would come if they continued to preach Jesus, and they shared how God had so wonderfully defended them.

Note a striking fact: whether or not to continue preaching was not even considered. The decision to carry the gospel to the whole world was made by Christ. It is not up for debate. Believers are commanded to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mk. 16:15).

2. The church could do but one thing: it triumphantly lifted its voice to God in prayer. But note: the prayer was triumphant and united: “they raised their voices together.” The triumph of the church is seen in the points of its convictions throughout the prayer. The word “together” means *they prayed* with one mind and one spirit. *They* focused and concentrated upon what was being prayed. Their minds were not wandering about. They were not half-heartedly praying, some praying and others thinking about their own affairs. They were raising “their voices together,” zeroing in on God and His wonderful care and provision. It is such group prayers that God hears and answers.

Mat 18:19 *“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”*

Mark 11:24 *“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

Jer 29:13 *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*

II. Acts 04:24 God’s Power; Creation

There was a conviction of God’s power. God is the One who created the universe in all its massiveness. God alone is the One who has such omnipotent power to create. Therefore, there is no one — no person, no being, no ruling body, no nation — not even a world that can stand and stop His will and power. This was the church’s great conviction of God’s power.

1. Note the word Lord (see *Lord*, Acts 2:36).
2. Note the phrase “heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.” This encompasses...
 - all the earth and all upon earth (sea or land).
 - all in the lower heavens (atmosphere).
 - all in the middle heavens (outer space).
 - all in the ultimate heavens (beyond space and time, where Christ is).

All things, whether visible or invisible, have been created by the Sovereign Lord of the universe. He and He alone is God; He is the One who possesses all power, the One whose will and purpose will be victorious. And more immediate, more at hand, He is the One who cares for and loves and oversees those who serve Him. He is the One who stands against the evil of lost and mean men, men who abuse and persecute other human beings.

John 1:3 *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

1 Cor 8:6 *Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

Col 1:16 *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*

Heb 1:2-3 *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Col 2:10 *And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*

ACTS 04: 24 LORD (DESPOTA)

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them." Acts 04:24

Lord means sovereign Master, sovereign Lord, sovereign Ruler. It is the word used by slaves in referring to their Master, slaves who are totally subjected to the Lord and Master of their domain. God is being addressed as "Sovereign Lord," the Sovereign Majesty, the Creator, Ruler and Lord of the whole universe and of all life. He alone is God and Sovereign Lord. No one else is — no person, no being, no ruling power, visible or invisible, physical or spiritual (see Rom 8:38-39; Col 1:16). □

III. Acts 04:25–28 God's Will and Purpose

There was a conviction of man's futility and God's plan or providence. The thought is that man will do evil. Man will persecute believers and attempt to stamp out the gospel and the church. But they will fail, for God has a plan and He will overrule and carry out His plan.

Now note a critical fact: God's plan — His providence and His working all things out for good — had already been proven. David's prophecy and the death of Christ had proven it.

1. Man will oppose God. God through David foretold their opposition in Scripture (see Psa. 2:1-2).
 - a. The nations, that is, the *lost* of the world, *rage* (*ephruaxan*): to neigh, stomp the ground like a fierce horse; to act untamed, haughty, unruly.
 - b. The peoples, that is, the *worldly*, "plot in vain": to be anxious over *empty* things; to focus one's life, time and energy upon *meaningless* possessions and *material things*, the empty, unsatisfying things of the world.
 - c. The *kings and rulers* stand up and gather together against God and His Christ, ["Anointed One"] the Messiah. They stand against; stand in an opposite direction; stand in opposition and hostility to God and Christ.
2. God planned and overruled man's opposition. God's *power and will determined* what was to be done.
 - a. The prophecy was primarily fulfilled in the death of Christ. Man stood against God's "holy servant Jesus"; they gathered together against Him and killed Him. But God overruled and raised Him from the dead. God took the events — all the evil of man — and worked it all out for good. His will to save the world is still marching on. God's will — His deliberation, His knowing all things and His possessing all power — worked everything out for good. (See *Death of Jesus Christ*, Acts 2:23; *Foreknowledge*, Acts 2:23; note, Acts 3:13-15)

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

- b. The prophecy is still being fulfilled in the lives of believers and the church. The world...
 - still rages,
 - still plots in vain,
 - still stands and gathers together against God, His Messiah and His church,...but to no avail. God's will and purpose still marches on. He overrules all the meanness and persecution of evil men. He sees to it that the glorious message of salvation is not stopped, the Word of God is not bound. He causes it to be spread and to save all who hear and will believe.

1 Cor 2:7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

2 Tim 1:9 Who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

2 Tim 2:8-9 *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.*

Titus 1:2-3 *A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.*

IV. Acts 04:29–30 Conviction of Mission and God's Concern

There was a conviction of God's mission and of God's concern.

1. Their mission was to speak God's Word. Note what they needed and what they prayed. They did not pray, did not need...

- for evil men to be destroyed
- for the persecution to stop
- for God to allow them to stop witnessing until things quieted down

They prayed for boldness, for more courage to bear testimony, no matter the abuse and opposition. They asked to be fearless, for God to remove their fear. Note they asked for "great boldness."

- a. The word *now* (nun) is stressed; there is heavy emphasis upon it. The church desperately needed its fear removed, and it wanted a strong courage to get about its business of witnessing.
- b. The word *consider* (epide epi) means to look upon. The church was asking God to concentrate and focus upon the persecution; to deal with it and to overrule the enemy; to give whatever was necessary to endure through it all.

=> To consider the persecution and remove what He would of it; to remove whatever fury was not to be used for His glory.

=> To consider the persecution and to give the faith and endurance to bear testimony *through* it; to use the persecution to praise His name.

Psa 76:10 *Surely your wrath against men brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained.*

Psa 10:13-14 *Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.*

- c. The word *servants* (doulois) is the word for bond slaves. The church was saying that they were the slaves of the Lord, to do His will, to share and speak God's Word despite persecution.

Mat 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 4:20 “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

2 Tim 1:8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.

2. Their need was also for power to heal and for miraculous signs and wonders, for a demonstration of God’s power to prove their claim, the claim that...
 - God’s Son did come to earth.
 - God’s Son did die.
 - God’s Son did arise.
 - God’s Son was exalted to the right hand of God.
 - God’s Son was still active and working in men’s lives today.

Only one thing could prove such a message: the power of the living Lord proving itself in miraculous signs and wonders. Note two significant points.

- a. The power lies “through the name” of Jesus (see *Name of Jesus*, Acts 3:6. See Acts 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18.)
- b. The power is for the glory of Jesus alone.

Mat 10:1 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Mark 16:17-18 “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

Mark 3:14-15 He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

1 Cor 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit.

Eph 1:19 *And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.*

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

V. Acts 04:31 Results: Boldness in Witnessing

The results of the church's prayer were threefold.

1. The place was shaken. The shaking was a miracle, a sign showing that God controlled the physical universe, just as they had prayed (v. 24).
2. They were filled with the Holy Spirit (see *Holy Spirit*, Acts 2:1-4). They needed a very special manifestation, a fresh experience with the Spirit.
3. They received the boldness for which they had asked. They bore strong testimony, speaking the Word of God with boldness and courage.

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Acts 4:13 *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Acts 9:29 *He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.*

Acts 14:3 *So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.*

Acts 19:8 *Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.*

Titus 2:15 *These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.*

1 Pet 3:15 *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. ■*

ACTS 03:06 NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

The Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Acts 03:06

To call upon the name of someone means to call upon the authority, power, office, nature and character of the person. The person’s name stands for all that the person is.

=> A king may send a decree throughout his kingdom. The decree goes out under his name, under his authority.

=> A government or business official may send a memo throughout his department. The memo goes out under his name, under his authority.

When Peter said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk,” he was proclaiming: “It is the name, the power, the authority, the Person of Jesus Christ who will heal you.” Jesus Christ is alive — His power, His authority, His name, His Person is still active upon earth.

Now note three critical facts about calling upon “the name of Jesus Christ.”

1. It is the name or the power of Jesus that meets the need. It is not Peter, nor is it silver and gold. Silver and gold can never bring health, not permanently. Ill health or disease or accident eventually catches us all; and when it does, no amount of money is of any help. It is Christ alone — His presence and power — that can meet our need.
2. Peter knew that the power of Jesus Christ dwelt within Christ Himself and only in Christ. But he also knew that he possessed the presence and power of Christ within his body, and that he was a called representative of Christ upon earth.

Note what Peter said: “What I have I give you.” He had the presence and power of Christ. It was that which he could give. In fact, that was his very purpose for being on earth, to represent Christ. He was to share Christ’s power with those who were sick and hurting throughout the world.

3. Peter acted first, not the man. Peter was the Lord’s representative (ambassador). Jesus had no way to reach the man; He had already ascended into heaven. Jesus had no body, no hands, no feet, no voice upon earth except those of the men and women whom He had left behind. Note two critical things.

=> If any act or work was to be done for God, they had to do it.

=> Only what they did would get done.

Thought 1. The same is true of us. Just think of the awesome truth: we are the ones who must act and take the first step.

=> Only what we do will get done.

=> If any act or work is to be done for God, we have to do it. There is no one else.

Mat 20:28 *“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

John 15:16 *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

John 20:21 *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

Acts 1:8 *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* □