

In The Face Of Opposition – Acts 4:23-31

Welcome. Livestream. If you're able, I trust you'll be able to join us in person as well.

Acts 4:23-31. We're on a journey through the book of Acts under the theme of *Compelled*. Because that's what we find. People just like us who were compelled to speak the Word of God with boldness.

But that compulsion didn't go unopposed, did it? And doesn't now. **(Intro)**
From co-workers and friends who scoff at you, to laws and lawsuits that infringe on our religious liberty. Opposition to righteousness and truth abounds.

There's Andrew Brunson being held under house arrest in Turkey.
Jack Phillips in Colorado, charged with discrimination for refusing to bake a cake for a transgender reveal party.
The University of Iowa claiming the same against Intervarsity, because their leaders have to be Christians. And the list goes on and on. Opposition abounds.

And I imagine some of you are experiencing opposition of a *personal* nature.
Maybe it's in your marriage. Where your husband *hates* that you come to church. Or your wife *despises* your faith.
Maybe it's your kids. Who reject Jesus and want nothing to *do* with your life.
Maybe it's the fallen nature of our world where sudden death or *injury* has struck your home. Or cancer has invaded your life. Or sin has broken out around you.
Regardless of the name, it's opposition.

And this passage is a perfect example of how to respond. What to *do* in the face of opposition. How to proceed when all seems lost.

➤ Peter and John have just been released from the custody of the ruling authorities, who told them *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus* (18). Opposition.
And the first thing they did, was . . .

1. Gather (v23)

V23 – *When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.*

When you encounter opposition as a follower of Jesus, get with other believers. Gather with your church. That's what Peter and John did.
Their *friends* were the believers they were closest to. The saints. The people in their church. They gathered. Because it's the best thing you *can* do.

The worst thing you can do in the face of opposition, is isolate yourself – go it alone, suffer alone. Do that, and Satan has won. Divide and conquer.
How much better to gather? How much better to get with others? How much better to *be* with each other?

Has disaster struck your life? Gather. Is life hard these days? Gather. Are you persecuted? Gather. Has opposition mounted? Gather.
Don't isolate yourself. And don't let your *friends* isolate themselves. Get together.

2nd, and this is where we'll spend the bulk of our time . . .

2. Pray (v24-30)

In the face of opposition, pray.

Peter and John went to their friends, told them what happened, and their friends *prayed*.
V24 – *When they heard it* [when they heard the report from Peter and John], *they lifted their voices together to God.*
That's prayer. They prayed together.

They didn't strategize, hypothesize, or act all wise – they prayed.
They didn't procrastinate, abdicate, or fill with hate – they prayed.
They didn't fire off an email or fire a gun, they prayed.

And we should too.

○ **First (v24)**

Pray first. “Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer!”
So wrote Joseph Scriven in 1855 when he was comforting his sick mother.
Later putting music to the poem in that famous hymn. “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” In the face of opposition, seek *him*. Get with *him*. First.

➤ 2nd, pray . . .

○ **Out loud (v24)**

Too many Christians think that praying out loud is optional. Something you do if you want to, but leave to others if you don't.
But that's not what the *early* church did. They *lifted their voices*. V24. Do you see it?
They prayed out loud. Verbally. Audibly. Openly.
There was no embarrassment, no hesitation, and no fear.

And need not be now. We're family. *Friends*. Partners in ministry. Co-laborers for Christ.
Connected by the Holy Spirit and covered in love.
And your out-loud prayers in the face of opposition may be the very thing God uses to fortify us, and spur us on.

I want you to know how encouraged I am when I pray with you. And hear *you* pray.
Whether it's up front before the service, or in our Small Group during the week, or at a **Night of Prayer**. Which is coming up by the way, Sept 16th.
Worship and prayer. Both out loud.
Because worshipping in silence all the time, is just as unthinkable as praying in silence all the time.

Audible prayer is one of the biggest blessings we can extend to each other.
So please, for our sake and yours both, pray out loud. Just like the *first* believers.

3rd, pray . . .

○ **With one accord (v24)**

That's the idea of the word *together* in v24. It carries the connotation of unity. *They lifted their voices together*. They prayed with one heart and one mind.
Thinking the same things about the *opposition*, and wanting the same things from God.
Walking in the same direction and pursuing the same goals.
In the face of opposition, whether yours or someone else's, we should pray with one accord. One voice.

4th, acknowledge God's sovereignty. Pray . . .

○ **Acknowledging God's sovereignty (v24)**

V24 – *When they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord . . .”*

From the get-go, they acknowledged God's rule and reign. His autonomous authority. His absolute control.

Why? And why now? Because it exalts *him*, and reminds *us* of our place.

That we're *not* in control. That we're *not* in charge. We're *not* calling the shots.

We're subject to *God*. This is *his* world, not ours.

And then there's the affirmation of our *security*. The very thing we lack *most* in the face of opposition.

Acknowledging God's sovereignty affirms our confidence that he's got it. That everything really *is* going to be okay.

Maybe not *this* side of eternity. But the other? Absolutely.

In the face of opposition, we should acknowledge God's *sovereignty* in our prayers.

5th, remember God's power. Pray . . .

○ **Remembering God's power (v24)**

V24b. They lifted their voices and said, “*Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them . . .*”

It's an open recollection of God's power in creating the universe.

To remind each other that if God did *that*, he can certainly deal with some piddly opposition.

If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31b)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? The protection of Christ. The provision of Christ.

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Or any other kind of opposition?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom 8:35-37). He's more than powerful to save and keep us in the face of opposition.

Pray with *that* in mind.

6th, cite God's Word. Pray . . .

○ **Citing God's Word (v25-26)**

There's nothing more powerful than *praying* Scripture, and praying *through* Scripture. As in using a passage to guide and *fuel* your prayers. Like this one for instance.

If you were praying through this passage, you would read v23, wait on the Holy Spirit to stir your thoughts accordingly, and then pray them back to God. Then v24. And 25.

It keeps you focused, and helps you pray according to God's will.

Few things are more powerful than praying through Scripture.

And when you can *cite* God's Word in prayer, applying it to the situation at *hand*, it's even more powerful. That's v25-26, quoting King David in Ps 2:1-2.

“*Sovereign Lord . . . [25] who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain [to no avail]? [26] The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’—[27] for truly in this city there*

were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Here's the flow of thought. They quoted Ps 2, to connect the dots between what God had *said*, and what was going on.

“You said it would happen, God, and it did. We've seen it.”

When you pray, try to cite God's Word. If he brings a verse to mind, quote it and apply it to the situation at hand. If he doesn't, turn to one. I do. All the time.

I don't know this thing by heart. But I sure do want to *invoke* it when I pray. I sure do want *God's* thoughts.

I sure do want to bring *his* Word to bear, and connect our dots to his.

Cite God's Word in the face of opposition.

7th, trust God's plan. Pray . . .

○ **Trusting God's plan (v27-28)**

For truly in this city [v27] there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel [that's pretty much everybody represented], [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. Determined beforehand.

Referring to the death of Jesus.

More than an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, this is an expression of trust.

“Whatever you do God and whatever you've planned, we're good with it.”

It's an expression of trust that God's not only sovereign, firmly in *control* to accomplish his purposes, but *predestines* things to do so.

As in, makes plans that cannot and will not be thwarted. Because he's all-powerful.

Can you think of anything more trust-worthy? More dependable than the unstoppable plans of a loving God? I can't.

Which means that even in the face of opposition, when it seems like things are *contrary* to his plan or *outside* his control, we can trust. And should.

Because *a man's steps are from the LORD* the Bible says (Prov 20:24).

And then 8th, ask for boldness. Pray . . .

○ **Asking for all boldness (v29-30)**

[29] And now, Lord, look upon their threats [the threats of the rulers to cease and desist from speaking about Jesus] 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.”

In other words, “While you *authenticate* your message with miracles and all, give us the boldness to *speak* it.”

“Give us the Spirit-led, Spirit-enabled conviction to *share* the Word; *preach* the Word; *advance* the Word.” That's what *they* prayed for.

What they *didn't* pray for, was relief.

They didn't ask God to *relieve* the persecution, like we tend to do. Or *remove* it.

They asked for boldness in spite of it. They asked for *more* power, *more* courage to speak about Jesus in the face of opposition.

And we should too.

If we're going to change our lives and change the world, we need to change our prayers. And start by asking for boldness. All of it. All that God gives, and all that there is.

- In 16th century France, right in the middle of the Reformation, 5 young seminary graduates, all in their 20's . . .
Were arrested and thrown in jail after spending time with John Calvin, one of the greatest theologians who's ever lived.

And over the next year, Calvin corresponded with those graduates for their encouragement and steadfastness. Urging them, among other things, to be bold.

And in one of their **replies**, they said this:

“We praise God with all our heart and give Him undying thanks . . . that He has granted us this honor . . . by giving us constancy to confess His Name and maintain the truth of His Holy Word before those who are unwilling to hear it – indeed, who persecute it with all their force . . .” (Thomas, *Acts*, 115)

In other words, they praised God for their *situation*, and they praised God for their *boldness*. Boldness to keep sharing, keep preaching . . .
And keep talking in the face of opposition.

And on May 16, 1553 – they were burned at the stake for it.

Trusting God's plan, remembering God's power, and acknowledging God's sovereignty. They were bold to the end.*****

And while that may not be our end, or our opposition, we should prayer for the same boldness.

And then last . . .

3. Respond (v31)

Gather, pray, and respond. V31 – *And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

They prayed, God answered, and they responded.

Not that God *always* responds like that, with something felt and seen. But he does answer. He does fill us.

And it's our responsibility to respond. To *act* on his compulsion. To *apply* his boldness. Whether it's at the stake, in our culture, or over coffee. **(Summary)**

When they had prayed, together, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered, and responded. With boldness.

May we do the same.

Prayer – Having spoken so much about prayer, I want to give you some time to do so.

If you're facing opposition these days, of any kind – spiritual, emotional, physical – let me encourage you to come down front, get on your knees, and pray. Right now.

Get before the Lord and acknowledge his sovereignty in your life, remember his power, cite his Word, confess your trust, and ask for boldness.

And if you remain in your seat, pray for those who aren't. You might even join them if they're a friend, and pray *together*.

Let's take a few minutes to do that.

And when the time comes, I'll lead us in prayer of one accord. **(Band)**

- **(Corporate Prayer)** Sovereign Lord who made the world and everything in it:
Look upon our land and preserve our freedom to speak your word with all boldness.
Look upon our church and grant us the privilege of more worship and discipleship.
Look upon our families and grant us the joy of growing together in Christ.
Look upon our lives and grant us the power of your resurrection.
We trust you and praise you. In Jesus' name, amen.