

(Outline)  
S.N. March 5, 84 A.M.

"A PROSPEROUS CHURCH - SATAN'S TARGET!"

Acts 4

INTRODUCTION:

The first three chapters of the book of Acts we have discussed - Chapter 1, under the title "Unhindered Gospel". The Gospel was getting ready to break out into all directions. They had the promise. In Acts 2 we discovered the "Empowered Church". The Holy Spirit had been promised for years and years, and at last came and empowered them. In Acts 3 we found the church offering something "Better Than Silver or Gold". The healing incident at the gate beautiful brought restoration of body plus a right relationship with God to a man that had been lame from his birth.

In Chapter 4 - Book of Acts - we consider "A Prosperous Church" - I mean not materially. I mean a church that is being successful and is thriving. And at this point, the church becomes the target of Satan. The first chapters of Acts give us the marvelous way in which God had blessed them. The Holy Spirit had visited them and people were coming and being saved.

If the Devil hates anything in the world - he hates to see a church that is successful. And that is prosperous. Souls being saved. What does he do? he stirs up the religious leaders of that day to bring intense persecution upon that church. The same thing is true today.

When God begins to bless a church today, and crowds of people begin to come to that church, and that church begins to build a great spirit among the people. When the atmosphere is such that people can be saved. Many are rejoicing. What does the Devil do?

Often he begins to work through some church members. Trouble is stirred up and God's work is hurt or hindered.

All the way through the book of Acts the pattern is this - the Christians go out and get people and witness. Secondly, a great work is done. Thirdly, the enemies of Satan come in and begin to persecute. And that is the test - that the Christians will stand true to Christ as they see the power of God coming in great measure. Or will they be subdued by Satan.

*Prayer went home for dinner, lady had 12 children, I bowed my head to say grace - when I looked up the lady asked me what I'd have for desert!*  
*Minister forgot the name of a couple he was going to marry said - will those wishing to unite in Holy matrimony please come forward after the service - 13 old hands came forward*

I. PROBLEMS OF THE CHURCH V. 1-22

First, growth brought persecution - V. 1-4.

In V. 1 - Peter and John in the name of Jesus Christ had just brought healing to a lame man. This had taken place in the temple area. Of which there were continual throngs of people. The spotlight of publicity was inevitable. The gate beautiful itself was the gate that led from the court of the Gentiles into the court of the women. And this was the place where it was the largest and the busiest of all the temple courts. For anyone, any nation to come and observe the ordinary laws. It was there that the money changers had their booths. And the sellers of sacrificial victims had their stalls. And this out of the boundary of the temple area, was a meeting place, and clearly this incident was the place where the Gospel would receive the largest and the widest publicity. There were crowds of people.

The religious leaders became intensely angry at what had happened - V. 1.

V. 2 - They were grieved, at the growth that was taking place here in the church. Now here was a man that was lame from his birth. Begging for a living.



And he was made strong and whole. Able to take his place in the community again.  
And the heart is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked.

Now the Sadducees were slow to line up with the Pharisees. But now they were taking the lead against Peter and John. The greatest shock ever produced by the presence of Christ was when he came forth from the tomb. This was contrary to their reason.

You remember new ideas. Edison was thought to be insane. The Wright Brothers were counted as fools. When they thought you could fly like a bird.

This explains why Christ was rejected by the Jews. The Sadducees would not believe in the resurrection. And they could not let this report go on because the church was growing. And they met it with violent anger. And they were going to destroy these men and their message. But their efforts to stop the report, only scattered them abroad. Matt. 22:23 - we read how the Sadducees denied the resurrection. They said that it was untrue. Hence, no trial could take place until the next day.

V. 3 - They laid hands on them and put them in prison.

V. 4 - Great growth took place. The men that believed was upwards of about 5,000 at that time. This is tremendous. Jesus started out with his 12 and then on Pentecost there were 3,000 - and now just a few days later, there were 5,000 men saved. We do not know how many women or children. This must have been an inspiring sight - 5,000 men confessing Christ, in one service. 5,000 men to put Christ first in their life.

Great growth. How many men are members of our church - of your church.

Suppose these were all to be present and all loyal. And all were to be consecrated.

And all men of conviction and courage. Who could estimate the strength of our church.

We need to make a special effort to have all of our men present in the services and to magnify the importance of the work of the church.

But Peter and John have been put in prison for their crime. The crime of preaching the Gospel - of healing the lame man.

Someone said that they could rejoice over there in the jail as well as they could have at home. When you think about that many people following the Lord Jesus Christ.

History tells us that in the State of Virginia, this state was settled first by members of the church of England, a state church. But two humble Baptist preachers had the courage to stand up and preach because since they had no license - they were arrested.

We discover that Patrick Henry, was employed to defend them. Or he took the case, and that all he did was to stand up before the court and say, what is the indictment against these two men. Preaching the glorious Gospel, as the son of God. Great God, that is the indictment. Are there no thieves going around unarrested and unconvicted. Are there no murders upon whom to visit. That you must indict and try these men for preaching the Gospel. He made such a plea that these Baptist preachers were set free.

This should ever be the challenge of the people of God. Here is our good work. Be hold this monument of grace. Now the miracle, the good work that they were doing, brought problems and persecution. There is still much opposition to the Gospel today.



We find it on every turn. Many times in the Armed Forces. The true Gospel preacher is unwelcomed. Because the world is at enmity with God. The Devil is behind all opposition to the Gospel. He began his opposition by forces outside of the church. Later on in the book of Acts, we will see that opposition came up inside the church.

Satan began to cover up through Christianity his ritual and ceremony. But these leaders agree over what the Apostles could preach. And what had taken place. And what had happened.

v.5  
Second, doctrines brought pressure. V. 5-12. V. 5- It came to pass that the rulers, the elders, the Scribes, the high priests, gathered because of the Doctrine. What they had preached - the resurrection through Jesus Christ. The Sadducees said there is no resurrection. And that Christ, Peter says, is raised from the dead. And the son of God, thank God, our redeemer liveth - Peter says. Yes, Peter preached Christ. What other message do we have. It was the only message. He could have talked about world disorder. The dignity of man. The capitalistic spirit. The conditions of his day. But he said nothing about them. But he talked about his Lord. And Peter and John were in prison. 5,000 believers - the church is growing. This is pretty bad. Jesus told us to preach the Gospel. And here they were in a dark dungeon. But we can rejoice about the 5,000 who have been saved.

Today there are some people who say that I don't like his sermons. But this is God's message for people to be saved. And they don't like the methods, or I don't like the way your church carries on. But we need to say is, let the Devil fight - let the world laugh - let men criticize. But let us go on preaching this doctrine which is the only doctrine that we have to preach.

Now the high priests and all their kinfolks gathered together and formed a counsel to try Peter and John. How could Peter and John be so calm and so unafraid in such an hour. When particularly the same counsel had just recently tried Jesus. Probably in the same court room.

Peter and John remembered - there were three classes that composed the Sanhedrin - the rulers, the chief priests, and the Scribes - who were usually the Pharisees. The elders were not in either class. There were 24 priests, 24 elders, and 24 Scribes. Gathered in this conference.

V. 7 - Indicates that the Sanhedrin sat in a (semi-circle). Now you and I have a rough road before us, if we remember that Jesus has been down this very road. And if we listen and hear him say, I will never leave nor forsake thee, then we need not fear. He will cause all things to work out alright.

V. 7 - By what power or in what name have you done this. This was a tremendous question that these men asked.

V. 8 - Peter took full advantage of the opportunity. The last time he was in this judgement hall, a servant asked him if he were a follower of Christ. And he had lost of all of his courage and claimed that he did not even know Jesus. But listen to him now. As he stands and accuses them of killing the prince of glory. Whence did this power come.

V. 8 - He was filled with the Holy Spirit. How we need to be filled with that power. Every true preacher knows that without that power, he cannot get anywhere. It is like a brick wall. He must feel the divine power within him as he preaches.

V. 9 - Peter turns the tables on these men.

V. 11 - Peter says you have asked me how this man was made whole, I will tell you.



It is through the power of Jesus - the crucified one that God has raised from the dead. And this man is the sample of the work of Jesus.

This was too good a chance to miss. So Peter charged the Sanhedrin with the responsibility for the death of Jesus.

V. 11 - And of your builders he said, your experts and your architects - you have rejected Jesus from your building. And God has made him the head of the corner. He is the corner stone. For years they had longed for deliverance. But they had made a big mistake when they had discarded the chief cornerstone in his attack. He amazed them. Christ is compared to a (stone 50 times) in the Bible. David calls him my rock and my fortress - my deliverer. Isaiah calls him a shadow in a great rock in a weary land. To shelter from the desert heat and to hide behind from the enemies. He is called the foundation stone - except the Lord build a house, they labor in vain that build it. Peter said the smitten rock in the desert from which flowed the sustaining waters was Christ.

Now Peter says the builders could (not use it). They had (rejected) his stone. And God has made him the first stone in the building, the strongest stone in the building.

V. 12 - He clarifies the doctrine which had brought pressure. Neither is there salvation in any other - there is none other name under Heaven given of men whereby we must be saved. This is an amazing statement and the greatest statement in the Bible. It needs to be underscored. Peter charges here is the crime of the crucifixion and he is about to close this doctrinal sermon by explaining the way of salvation. It was a good sermon. The Bible has one message for the whole world. If you are not interested in being saved, you will not get much out of Peter's discussion here.

Emphasis one thing - Jesus Really Saves!!

Now there are people who talk about going on trips and their destination. They reach by various routes. But Peter says if you are traveling to Heaven, you are going to reach there only by one road. A lot of people contend today that they are willing for Christ to be one Saviour, but they are not willing for Him to be the only Saviour. But that is exactly what Jesus claimed for himself - Heaven was one way and Jesus was the only answer to it.

He met the crippled man's physical needs - he was lame. He met his social needs - he was an out-cast, and friendless. He met his intellectual needs. And he met his needs as a sinner when he made room for him.

Now the Sanhedrin was within its rights to inquire of Peter and John. By what power, or what name have you done this. (Deut. 13) - there was instruction that if any prophet performed a sign among them, designed to lead people away from Jehovah, they were to examine him. And if he were found guilty, they were to put him to death.

That a miracle had been performed - these men could not deny. The lame man had been healed before their eyes. And they asked him by what power. And he declared, by the name of Jesus Christ.

And those today who see the evidence of the continuing work of Jesus will know by what name this work is carried on. But like the Sanhedrin, you still need salvation.

Some news reporter once reported on Billy Graham's New York Crusade, in a synical way. He said the crowd was well dressed. There were no people from skid row present, that came to New York to be converted.

Now this may be the attitude of some of you who listen to me. You say, if a



cultured man, a well-dressed man, a well fed man, a well housed man - he does not need salvation. But the truth and the doctrine is, that if you live on Park Avenue or skid row in New York - it does not matter with God. You need salvation.

Notice the word other that is translated here - any other that we discover in this verse of Scripture. It was true then and it is true now. The Greek word had meaning. There was no other of like kind. And this was where Peter was putting the emphasis of his preaching. Nor can you be saved otherwise. Though you may perform some self-righteous acts.

Isaiah 64:6 - tells us we are all as an unclean thing. And all our righteousness are as filthy rags. And we all do fade as a leaf and our iniquity like the wind. Taking us away.

This emphasizes the need of salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Simply, there is no other name. And that word means another of a different kind. The ways of salvation outside of the Jewish religion, offered. That the Roman's offered by worshipping the emperor. That none of these ways were satisfactory ways of salvation. People have challenged this - but Christ is the only hope in this confused world today. In the despair of this modern age today. People are unwilling to admit that they have failed without God. They would rather think that God is dead. What this hour needs is a demonstration of our faith in God.

Men may reason themselves into a blind alley of frustration. But Christ is the only hope, Peter says, for a lost and dying world. The son of God goes forth to war. A kingly crown to gain. His blood red banner streams afar who follows in his train.

How shall we respond to this - the answer is - Onward Christian soldiers - marching as to war. With the cross of Jesus - going on before. Christ, the royal

master, leads against the foe. Forward into battle, see his banner go.

We have strange ideas today - it makes no difference what you believe as long as you are sincere, people say. We are all traveling different roads - but we are all trying to get to the same place. Such statements do not run hand in hand with the Bible. Peter in speaking said, neither is there. There is no other. There is not another of the same kind. In this verse, it does not mean that there are others like Jesus. There are many who offer themselves as Saviour of men. The Bible clearly says that only Jesus Christ of Nazareth - whom was crucified and whom God raised from the dead. Is the real Saviour.

Now the great religions of the world have many founders. It is true, that whatever religion one may follow - he is seeking salvation or trying to establish a proper relationship to a deity. But it is one thing to seek God and another thing to be sought after God. But man falls short in this point.

Matt. 24:5 - Jesus said, for many shall come in my name saying I am Christ. And shall deceive many. He forewarned that there would be many that would come. Offering themselves as a political, or a military Messiah to save the Jews. Or to save them from the Roman bondage. Rev. Moon has come forth in our generation - saying he is a Messiah. Now this is what Matt. 24:5 has to say.

Third, loyalty to God brought prohibitions, V. 13 - 22.

13  
The growth brought persecution. Their doctrines brought pressure. Now their loyalty to God brings prohibitions upon them. They had proclaimed the truth - they had pressed the sin home in Jesus name. Everything was in the name of Jesus. And if you go back and study, you will find that it was the name of Jesus that gave



life to Lazarus. That brought forgiveness to the woman at the well. That brought new life to the Apostle Paul.

V. 13 We note that they observed the boldness. They were unlearned and ignorant men. *My sons son Hospital, Dr. explained to him just sleep for surgery - when I give him that He won't know anything - Mt man - you can forget that step - He don't know nothing now!*

The rulers recall that they had seen Peter and John often with Jesus. And they knew them as unlearned and unlettered men. Now this does not mean that they were ignorant as most people would term the idea today. But it means that they were laymen. Now that doesn't mean that they were ignorant because they were laymen. But it means this - that they were a man who did not have an office. For illustration, they were a common soldier and not an officer in the Army. They were not skilled in this field.

So they had contempt for them because the Sanhedrin regarded them as having no kind of technical education, nor had they observed any kind of regulations, or fulfilled any kind of law. What they really meant, they did not have professional qualifications. Today you would say college education, or maybe some other regulations that some church or religious group had set up.

They notice however that what had happened, these men were very very bold and powerful. And they didn't want this movement to go any farther. We should recognize that the things of God are going to last forever.

The boldness came through the Holy Spirit - they took notice of the fact, that they had been with Jesus. These men walked with Christ. We hate him, but we must admit his greatness. That's the way we ought to live today - in such a manner that those around about us notice a difference in our lives. For example, a person becomes a Christian - he ought to be an easier person to live with. The thing that has happened, is that you have come to know Jesus Christ. And not

do you want to live for self and for the world. But for Jesus. And these preachers have power - not because they had any great things that they had experienced in a technical way. But simply, they had been in the school of Jesus and in the school of the spirit. And this boldness had come through assurance, conviction, bearing faith, and through divine obligation.

V. 14 - The defense of an unanswerable fact - it was undeniable that here was the burden of proof to the critics. They saw a man who had been crippled, begging, and here is an exhibit, of Christ's power and they could say nothing against it.

This is the unanswerable argument of Christianity. Today people look at the hypocrites and the back-sliders around them. And they declare that there is nothing in Christianity. And when you and I are changed, and live as we should, they cannot lift their voice against our religion. Paul admonishes us to adorn the doctrine of God. Titus 2:10. This means that we are to make Christianity as attractive as possible. Clean, useful, consecrated Christian lives.

Here was a man that had been cured.

Here was utter loyalty to God. They were obeying God. And the trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbors sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God.

V. 16 - They could not put these men to death for the people had witnessed a miracle. The leaders were afraid of the consequences.

V. 17 - They strictly commanded them.

V. 18 - That they not speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore. They were trying to prohibit their loyalty to God.



But how can you stop a God-called and a God-sent preacher. You might as well tell the sun to stop shining or the rain to stop falling. Or the wind to stop blowing or the flowers to stop blooming.

You may pass any judgement that you please upon a God-sent preacher, and you may put any kind of prohibition upon him, that you wish - but the Lord has sent his man on a mission. And the trouble with many people is, they listen to the voice of others.

John Knox, it is said, that he feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.

V. 20 - Their personal defense was they had an experience with Jesus Christ and they could not stop speaking. They knew first hand that it was truth and they staked their life upon it. And they stood with them and we must talk or die. Nothing could keep them from talking. They were commissioned to speak, by a divine authority.

V. 22 - This man was above 42 or 40 years of (age). This tells us that Christ can save those of any age who come to him.

## II. PERSERVERANCE OF THE CHURCH - V. 23-37

We have talked about the problems of the church. How growth brought persecution. How doctrines brought pressure. How loyalty to God brought prohibitions. Now we come to take a brief look at the perserverance of the church.

23 First, prevailing in worship - V. 23.

They sought their company of fellow Christians. Birds of the feather flock together, they tell us. And somebody else has said, if you will tell me with whom you associate, I will tell you what kind of person you are.

A true Christian feels at home only among Godly people. He is miserable among other kinds of people.

There was great conviction in the lives of these Christians. They felt the power of God. They had a conviction of the power of God. They gathered with their own company to worship. They had been threatened, to curb, to prune, to correct, and to punish. But now they come with their own group in worship. And they will here worship God. If you love the Lord, you are going to take your refuge around those who gather to worship the risen Lord. And they prevailed in worship.

Second, praying in one accord - V. 24. These believing Christians had a conviction of the power of God - he is the God who made heaven, earth, sea, and all that is within them. The creation.

They were united - V. 24. They had already proved the value of united prayer. They would trust to see the power of it again. They seemed never to forget the words of the glorified master. If two of you shall agree - Matt. 18:19. United prayer is one of the mightiest weapons that God has put in the reach of his people. Every church, no matter how small, has this overcoming power, in its hand. All that it has to do is use it.

V. 25 - They were praying for 2nd psalm. This was a Scriptural prayer as they prayed in one accord. That they might neither be afraid nor ashamed. It gives them power that they might dwell in the word of God richly.



V. 29 - It was a definite prayer. Now Lord grant unto - that with all boldness they might speak thy word. They prayed for and they expected an immediate answer. Now, they said. They spread out their needs.

Acts. 14:3.

There is a difference in saying prayers and making a direct personal appeal to God, for a present declaration of his saving power. This was what was taking place in this prayer.

V. 26-27 - They knew that there were those who had set themselves in array against the Messiah. Herod, Pilate, all these things tried to shake things.

Third, praising the sovereign Lord. V. 31. It was time now that this prayer had proclaimed the grace of God. They thanked him. They asked for boldness. To preach. The counsel had asked them not to preach Christ anymore. And when they had finished this prayer, the place was shaken. And they spake the word of God boldly.

God had answered their prayer and there was a shaking. And there a testifying that followed.

A papal envoy threatened Martin Luther, with what would follow if he persisted in his course and they warned him that in the end he would be a deserter and would be deserted by all of his supporters. Where will you be then? demanded the envoy -- then, as now, Luther answered, in the hands of God.

The Christian will have a great deal against him but he also had a lot going for him.

And these Christians were convicted of man's rebellion against God. It is translated as rage - used of high-fed and spirited horses who trample and toss their heads, and in the end they must accept the discipline of the reigns. Man may make his gestures against God. But in the end, God must be sovereign.

They had set themselves in remembrance of Jesus and they had prayed for, courage and they took it to God and they stretched out their lives before eternity. And the result was the gift of the spirit. They were not left comfortless is what happened here.

Power - the power of prayer has never been withdrawn. And some Christians never go to church. If they prayed, they would be shaken. They would take their place in God's house.

Some people never serve the Lord. If they prayed, they would be shaken. And they would get busy for God.

Some people never give anything to God's work. If they prayed, God would shake them and they would begin giving some tithes and offerings.

Some children have gone astray. If they prayed, they would be shaken. And their parents would begin setting a good example for them.

Some people are substituting criticism for service. They could pray and their attitude would be changed. They would not be neglectful and cold.

Fourth, participation with possessions. V. 32-37.

They have one heart, one soul, one accord. No wonder they did great things and



their numbers grew. That was the first church. It was a prosperous church but Satan had a target and then was shooting at it. And every true church that has its part in the transforming of life and the changing of lives, will meet with the opposition of Satan.

The things to remember in this is here - they had all things in common. They had great power and witnessing. They had great boldness in God. And everybody gave what he could. And they were filled with the spirit. Barnabas, a well-to-do-  
37- man sold his land. And brought some money here to help with that early group of  
Christians.

Each one had an intense responsibility for each other.

They woke up to the real desire to share all that they had.

Everytime the Devil opposes these believers - they stood up for their belief. They won out and God's kingdom was advanced. This is just what we need today.

This is no day for weaklings and turn-coats in the kingdom of God. This is the time for us to give our best for Christ and his church. While the world is at it's worse. We must be sure to give our best.

Has the church perservered in worship. Prayed, and praised God, participated. We discover that God's love was extended to all. And God's spirit dwelled within the church. And the church had surprising resources for ministry. And miracles helped to move the church forward. And obedience to God was the most important thing in the lives of those Christians.

When Napoleon's army invaded Russia, they came to a village where everyone had

fled except one man. He was a woodsman - with a handle of an axe stuck in his leather belt. They started to shoot him. But he showed such calmness that a French captain decided to save his life. He said, we will mark him with a brand for life. They heated an iron and stamped the letter "N" in the palm of his hand. What does that mean asked the man, that is the letter n. It stands for Napoleon. You belong now to our emperor.

The man who had always been a loyal Russian thought that he must show his loyalty - he took the axe from his belt, put his hand on a block, and cut his hand off at the wrist. Saying, the hand may belong to Napoleon, but I am a Russian. I will die a Russian.

May God help us to cut out of our lives everything that is not honoring the Christ. We stand up before all the world and give him the best life that can be lived.