

“Seeds of Persecution”

Acts 4

Jerry Grey, 2025

We will see the seeds of persecution planted in this chapter. On the heels of the healing of the crippled man, fear and loss of power swept into the hearts of the Jewish leaders, elders, and priests.

Warren Wiersbe has said, “that in his sermon at Pentecost, Peter proved from the scriptures that Jesus was alive; but now he proved it by the miraculous change in the beggar’s life. The man was healed through the power of the name of Jesus. Sadducees did not believe in resurrection so they wanted to put a stop to the ministry of the apostles. This was the official beginning of the persecution of Christians.

Acts 23:6-8

" 6 When Paul realized that one part of them were Sadducees and the other part were Pharisees, he cried out in the Sanhedrin, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees! I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!" 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, and no angel or spirit, but the Pharisees affirm them all.

HCSB

As noted in chapter 3, the crowds were big, the people were excited, and the name of Jesus was being used. The leaders worst nightmare was upon them. The man they had killed just might have come back to life and His followers seemed to have some kind of new energy and passion.

We will look at 5 or 6 areas in this vignette that Dr. Luke has given us. Chapter 4 will flow something like this.

Outline:

The Arrest- 1-4
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One of the first hurdles that the early church had was the attempts by the *Religious Crowd* to stop evangelism, healings, and identification with the name and power of Jesus. You will remember that the disciples were warned about this. Jesus promised that He would be with the disciples and that the Holy Spirit would speak for them in persecution. That's exactly what happened.

Matt 10:16-28

16 I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

17 "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. 18 On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 23 **When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.** I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! 26 "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

NIV

The disciples were **not** going to stop speaking in the name of Jesus and doing ministry in the power of that name. Christians today will do the same. We will **not** stop doing what God has called us to do. I know that you are aware that many of the people in the administration of Donald Trump have been criticized, and even in court by a judge, were asked to remove the crosses from around their necks. They wouldn't do it, and I applaud their actions. The judge never would have removed his robe if he were asked to do that because the robe identifies him as the judge in the courtroom. The cross represents who we are and what we believe, and if we were to remove the cross from around our necks, we would not be worthy of the cross upon which our Savior died.

To ask a Christian to remove the cross from their neck is equivalent to blaspheming the name of Jesus Christ. We are crucified with Christ, nevertheless, we live because of that cross. Why would we deny the name and the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The cross of Jesus is what makes us Christian. We will not stop speaking and ministering in the name of the One who died on that cross and then rose again. Peter had preached a message about the resurrected Christ; now the Jewish leaders we're being confronted with the risen Christ whom they had killed. The New Testament church was about to be born from the blood of the

Saints. The rulers thought they could sweep the crucifixion under the rug and move on. God had other plans.

I. The Arrest: 1-4

The disciples stirred up a powerful group of people when they healed this crippled man.

- The Priest
- The Temple Guards, the commander no less, not Roman soldiers
- The Sadducees- Did not believe in the Resurrection
- The Rulers- “The rulers were probably people in various positions of authority, the heads of governmental departments and committees” (Boice).
- Elders- Distinguished older men who lived in Jerusalem that had great influence (Boice).
- Scribes- The men who copied and were in charge of the scriptures. They were to know the scriptures.
- Anas- The High priest. Anas was the true and original High Priest. The Romans had placed Caiaphas in that position but the Jews didn’t really recognize him as the true High Priest. The Jews knew the High Priest was a High Priest for a life time appointment.
- John- a man of the priestly family, not John the apostle.
- Alexander and all the members of the priestly family.

Boice says we have six categories of people who were after Peter and John.

The text tells us why these rulers were so upset. The disciples were speaking to the people and they were listening. They were teaching the people and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, v.

2.

The Sadducees were worried about doctrine because *their* doctrine was wrong. They didn't believe in the resurrection so they could not allow this to continue. The healed man was a threat to their doctrine because John and Peter proclaimed that the power of the risen Christ had worked the miracle.

The temple police were brought to enforce the wishes of the Jewish leaders. Does that sound familiar? We are experiencing this same show of force today in our political realms.

The Rulers were provoked, HCSB. The Greek word is **diaponeo**. This word means "to toil through, to be worried, or grieved." **Diaponeo** is a derivative of **ponos**, which means anguish, pain, or toil. These rulers were in pain over the preaching. Isn't that something?

When we are preaching the truth and it challenges other people's false teaching, it gets them upset.

I love the fact that Luke tells us that they used Jesus as an example. The Greek preposition **ἐν** is translated as *through, in, or by means of*. The HCSB translated the passage as "using Jesus as an example," which is correct. If the preacher wants to be correct, use Jesus as an example. Prepositions are extremely important in the Greek language.

The leaders were so mad that they seized the Disciples. Our word here is **epiballo**. This is literally "**to throw upon.**" The police cast, fell, or lay upon Peter and John. Then grabbed them up, in other words. Then they put them in jail until the next day.

Verse 4 is just awesome. What was the result of their preaching? Undeniable success in evangelism. The classic order of salvation took place. Faith comes by hearing the Word and then belief. Just awesome.

II. The Interrogation: 5-12

There were 11 individuals, and at least six categories, and one entire family involved the next day in this interrogation. That's extreme escalation. The religious order, the police, and the government were all involved.

I can see this interrogation in my mind. How intimidating must this have been for Peter and John? These two men stood their ground and brought glory to God through their commitment and witness about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Two questions were asked:

- Whose power are you using?
- In whose name was this miracle performed?

Notice that there was no denial that the miracle was done. This could not be hidden or denied since everyone knew the crippled man. *When God changes a person, there is no mistake about what has happened.*

The Jews actually sent the temple police to arrest Jesus once, and when the police went to arrest Jesus, His words were so powerful they came back without their prisoner.

John 7:43-46

- 43 Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. 44 Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.
- 45 Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"
- 46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared.

NIV

Verse 7: Look at verse 16. When God does a work, it cannot be denied. Now listen carefully... this is a truth that will help you. No man can say these words or ask this question and be saved. "By what power or in what name have you done this?" If you do not know the answer, you're probably lost. I have lived around so many people that have hindered the work of God because they wouldn't know the power or name of Jesus working if they tripped over it.

Verse 8: This verse tells us how these men stood in front of all these people and never cracked. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. Contrast this verse with Luke 22:54ff. There is a great difference in Peter.

Luke 22:54-62

54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. 55 But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. 56 A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

57 But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.
58 A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

59 About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

60 Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly.

NIV

The apostle Peter was not afraid anymore. Peter does what every good believer would do... preach! He answers their question and then gives more information than they asked for. Peter was filled (APP) with the Spirit. When a person is filled with Jesus, they can't help but talk about him. On the other hand, lost people never talk about Jesus, even if they are being interrogated.

Verse 9: To examine is the word **krino**. This is a popular word in the NT. **Krino** mean to examine, ask, judge, interrogate, determine or scrutinize.

“If you are examining us as to how this man was healed then be it known to you and all the people of Israel that by the Name of Jesus the Nazarene – you know, the One you all killed and the One God raised from the dead- that this man is standing here healthy,” v. 10. This was a powerful testimony.

The crippled man was there, standing, and whole. Peter brings a prophetic word about Christ to the rulers who should have known who Jesus was.

Ps 118:22-24

22 The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
23 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

NIV

The men of that day, and the men of this day, try their best to deny, destroy, and detract from “this Jesus,” but He is the Head of the corner. What builder would be so foolish that he would toss the established corner stone away. The very thing that keeps the rest of the building square and in line was tossed away. The very starting point from which we build all other things was seen as

unimportant. You will never build a building without a squaring instrument.

Peter says that the very stone you rejected has become the most important established fact in all of history. The cornerstone is Jesus. Jesus is the eternal foundation upon which all things are built. No Jesus, no building.

Job 38:4-6

4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
6 On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone—
NIV

Isa 28:16

16 So this is what the Sovereign Lord says:
"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a tested stone,

a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who trusts will never be dismayed.
NIV

Jer 51:26

(Concerning Babylon for her sins against the Jews)

26 No rock will be taken from you for a cornerstone,
nor any stone for a foundation,
for you will be desolate forever,"
declares the Lord.
NIV

Zech 10:4

4 From Judah will come the cornerstone,
 from him the tent peg,
 from him the battle bow,
 from him every ruler.

NIV

Eph 2:19-22

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

NIV

1 Peter 2:6

6 For in Scripture it says:
 "See, I lay a stone in Zion,
 a chosen and precious cornerstone,
 and the one who trusts in him
 will never be put to shame."

NIV

Every soul must fall upon this stone or else be crushed by it.

Luke 20:17-18

17 And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written,
 The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the
 head of the corner?
 18 Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on
 whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

KJV

Verse 12: You should have this verse memorized. When I tell you there is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved, I am not just spouting off what I think or believe; I am teaching you the eternal, inspired Word of God concerning salvation by or through **no other name but Jesus**. This is a staple memory verse.

What follows is a lot of verses, but in today's theological climate I think it necessary to state this truth clearly.

John 14:6:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father **except through me**.

NIV

Matt 12:21

21 In his **name** the nations will put their hope."

NIV

Luke 21:12

12 "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my **name**.

NIV

Luke 24:46-47

"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his **name** to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

NIV

John 1:12-13

12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his **name**, he gave the **right** to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

NIV

John 3:18

18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the **name** of God's one and only Son.

NIV

John 20:30-31

30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing **you may have life in his name**.

NIV

Acts 2:21

21 And everyone who calls on the **name** of the Lord will be saved.'

NIV

Acts 2:38

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the **name of Jesus Christ** for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

NIV

Acts 9:15-16

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my **name** before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

NIV

Acts 9:21

21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those **who call on this name**?"

NIV

Acts 9:27-28

27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the **name of Jesus**. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

NIV

Acts 10:43

43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins **through his name**."

NIV

Acts 10:48

48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the **name of Jesus Christ**. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

NIV

Acts 15:25-26

25 So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul—

26 men who have risked their lives for the **name** of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NIV

Acts 22:16

16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, **calling on his name.**'

NIV

Rom 10:12-13

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who **call on him**, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the **name** of the Lord will be saved."

NIV

1 Cor 6:11

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified **in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ** and by the Spirit of our God.

NIV

Phil 2:9-11

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the **name that is above every name**,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

NIV

2 Tim 2:19

19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, **"Everyone who confesses the name** of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

NIV

Heb 13:15

15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that **confess his name**.

NIV

1 John 2:12

12 I write to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven **on account of his name**.

NIV

1 John 3:23

23 And this is his command: **to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ**, and

to love one another as he commanded us.
NIV

1 John 5:13

13 I write these things to you who believe in the **name of the Son of God** so that you may know that you have eternal life.
NIV

Rev 2:13

13 I know where you live — where Satan has his throne. **Yet you remain true to my name.**
NIV

Rev 11:18

The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who **revere your name**,
both small and great —
NIV

Rev 19:13

13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and **his name is the Word of God.**
NIV

Rev 19:16

16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this **name** written:
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.
NIV

Rev 22:4

4 They will see his face, **and his name will be on their foreheads.**
NIV

III. The Undeniable Truth- 13:-17

Verse 13: **Theoreo** is the word Luke used for **observed** or **saw**. When the rulers perceived or considered the situation, they knew that the disciples were not going to budge and they could not deny what had happened.

Peter and John had the **boldness** of the Holy Spirit guiding them and giving them **confidence**. **Parrhesia** means *all out spokenness*. This is frankness and bluntness. This is what the NT

church and every Christian needs in their witness. We need bold confidence.

The Jews realized that these men were uneducated, and that they were speaking by another entity. These men were filled with Jesus. The Greek word for uneducated is **agrammatos**. With the negative article this means unlettered, unlearned, or illiterate. Yet, even lacking education, these men were amazing. Give me a hot-hearted preacher filled with Christ over a lost scholar any day.

Luke even uses the word **idiotes** for the word ignorant. The apostles were uneducated and untrained, yet, they were laying the foundation for the NT church and about to change the world. Availability is more important than ability.

Someone told Johnny Hunt one time he was just “ignorance on fire.” I have been told I am just a “redneck with a little education.” Those comments come from men who think too highly of themselves. These people are usually jealous of the power of God that rests on a godly man that has spent lots of time with Jesus. There is a perceived recognition of the work and blessings of God being done by the common man that may not be taking place at the Crystal Cathedral or “Fust” Baptist Church. It’s pure jealousy.

Acts 17:5

5 But the Jews were **jealous**; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city.

NIV

The truth is that ignorance on fire and rednecks with a little education are smarter than those guys all day long.

Verse 14: This is the power of a changed life. You and I are undeniable. We have been changed and it’s obvious. Here we

stand. Not perfect, but changed, filled with the Spirit, different, new, blessed, growing, forgiven, and bold.

If I am reading the original correctly, and I believe I am, the text shows that the healed crippled man was standing with John and Peter. This healed crippled man was right there in front of the Jews. The Greek word is **blepo**, which means to see, perceive, or behold. There is no way to deny a healed man right in front of you.

The word healed is **therapeuo**, which means cured, healed or relieved. We get our word therapy from this word. The verb healed is a Perfect Passive Participle. This means that the man was completely healed from an outside source in an instant with continual results. That sounds like the work of Jesus doesn't it?

Verse 15: Here lies the problem with the entire counsel. Instead of asking the apostles about the resurrected Christ, they sent the men out and conferred with themselves. Don't you think it's about time you stopped conferring with yourself about Jesus and ask God about Him?

Greek: **συμβαλλο**– **Sunballo**. This is the word **with** or **beside** added to the word to **throw**. When we think about something, we toss ideas next to each other, and seek a conclusion. A **parabole** is a parable, which means to toss something known besides something unknown to come to a conclusion.

People find it difficult when they only have human ideas to toss beside other human ideas to come to the truth. You need to stop conferring with yourself and start asking God what He thinks about Jesus. Everything they ever wanted to know about Christ was right there in the conference room. Just ask.

Illustration: A man was witnessing to another man, and he mentioned the Bible. The man said, “I am an atheist; I don’t believe in the Bible.” The Christian asked him if he had read the Bible and what was it he didn’t believe. The atheist said, “I have never read the Bible; I don’t believe in it.” The man said, “Sir, you are not an atheist, you are an idiot.”

Stop conferring with your buddies and your family. Stop listening to the people at work. Stop believing your girlfriends. Don’t even trust a preacher or teacher with your thoughts about who Jesus is. Trust the Word of God. Talk to Jesus yourself. Ask God to reveal the true Jesus to you.

Verse 16-17: The Jews were still trying to save face. The healing was evident and undeniable, but they wanted to stop the glory of God. By this time, all of Jerusalem was abuzz about this miracle. The power of Jesus lives on. Men may try to put the gospel away and try to stop Christians from Kingdom Building, but it’s a fruitless endeavor.

Threats and beatings only inspire us and creates more passion to win the world to Jesus. We will not stop speaking in His name. Assassinate Charlie Kirk, and a thousand people will take his place.

Throughout the millennia, wicked rulers have conferred with themselves, and they tried to stomp out Christianity. What they actually did was increase the number of Christians and their passion for Christ. History shows us undeniably that persecution grows the church. The Roman rulers tried their best to eradicate Christianity to no avail.

The National Catholic Register Lists these Roman rulers as persecutors of the church.

11 Roman Rulers Who Tried to Destroy Christianity and Failed

“It is a persistent evil to persecute a man who belongs to the grace of God,” said the martyr St. Cyprian of Carthage. “It is a calamity without remedy to hate the happy.”

Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar suggested, not without historical proof, that the early Christians were considered *dangerous* to the Roman Empire — which was on its last legs without even realizing it — and thus they were persecuted since “right from the beginning Christianity was seen as a total, highly dangerous revolution.” Part of this comes from the fact that the Roman hierarchy considered its Greek-imported polytheistic panoply of gods as *necessary* to maintaining public order.

However, as we all know, it didn’t take long for the leaders of Rome to go from looking askance at these new Jewish “converts” to Christianity to murdering them wholesale. Why this swing to the extreme? Well, for one thing it’s always good for a single-party demagogue to have a scapegoat when things go wrong, and traditionally the Jewish people have had that role thrust on them. For another: if the rulers are also murderers, it makes elimination of their enemies much easier on their non-existent conscience.

But who were these lunatic leaders? Here are 11 of the worst:

1. Nero (37–68)

The first, worst and best-known of the psychopathic Caesars, it didn’t hurt his successors that he’d committed such atrocities, as it made them easier to re-institute, or simply to continue with the carnage. His story and legend is so well-known that there’s no need to repeat it here, save that he began a blanket persecution of Christians. However, as Socialists like to find nice things to say about mass-murdering maniacs like Stalin (e.g., that he “industrialized the Soviet Union”), it has been attributed to Trajan that “Nero’s rule excelled all other emperors.” While it is true that Nero’s reign began well enough and he did get a lot of building done, he also commenced the full-blown slaughters of believers in Christ, and carried out atrocities that even our jaded post-modern sensibilities cringe at.

2. Vespasian (69–79)

Another emperor whose legacy included not only the persecution of Christians but the demolition of the beloved Temple of Jerusalem in AD 70. His decade-long rule saw Rome plant boots (or at least footprints) in both Bavaria and Britain. Vespasian was unique in that he’d been a senator and a soldier, so

perhaps it's no surprise he was Machiavellian before there was a term for it. He saw the formation of his dynasty, whose main legacy was the lunatic Domitian.

3. Domitian (81-96).

Almost every major writer of the time from Pliny to Suetonius claims that Domitian, who wound up ruling longer than almost any other Roman ruler in that period, was a tyrant. St. John the Apostle and Evangelist would agree, as he was immersed in a tub of boiling oil in AD 95 at the explicit command of this emperor. However, as we are told by *Butler's*, the oil acted only as a refreshing bath, and Domitian had St. John, the Beloved Disciple, exiled to the isle of Patmos by Domitian, where he wrote the Book of Revelation (The Apocalypse) under inspiration.

4. Trajan (98-117)

According to the ancient writer Pliny, Trajan was at best a monarch, at least an autocrat, and at worst a tyrant. Even-handed in dealing with the Roman Senate during his lifetime — no small feat, as the emperors had at best a “stressed” relationship with that once-august body — the senators officially deified him upon his death, hence the famous “Trajan’s Column” in Rome, which stands to this day. For all of the publicity as being one of “Good Caesars,” he continued the persecution of the Christians unabated, and for good measure, expanded the Roman Empire more than any other ruler since Caesar Augustus by military conquest. He was also a fan of the bloody displays of horror of the gladiatorial games.

5. Hadrian (117-138)

Like Trajan, he was of Spanish descent (and perhaps Trajan’s cousin) and famous for his wall in northern Britain. Hadrian kept Trajan’s policy on Christians in place — there was no active house-to-house hunting out of them, but those who flouted the norms of the Roman polytheistic belief-system were persecuted. A poet-warrior, he took the fight to Britain (hence the wall), Africa, and ordered another brutal bulldozing of the Palestinian Jews.

6. Marcus Aurelius (161-180)

Made famous in his time for being the Stoic philosopher-warrior and in our time by Richard Harris’ portrayal of him in the 2000 movie *Gladiator*, unquestionably Christian persecution increased during his reign, though some historians are quick to point out that this can’t be directly traced back to the emperor himself. “It’s good to remember that Christian persecution during this era was not quite as centralized as we think it to be: it was sporadic, and based more on various states and provinces rather than within Rome itself,” notes one professor of history. Regardless, Marcus Aurelius, for all his many

military conquests, philosophical brilliance and centralization of Rome did nothing to prevent the persecution of Christians and perhaps much to foster it.

7. Maximinus the Thracian (235-238)

With Maximinus Thrace, we are on surer grounds of Christian killings on the part of the centralized Roman state, particularly in the person of the emperor. An authority no other than Eusebius states in his watershed history of the early Church that in the persecution of 235 Maximinus sent Sts. Hippolytus and Pope St. Pontian into exile, where they were reconciled and died on the Isle of Sardinia.

8. Decius (249-251)

One of two of the later Roman emperors (the other was Diocletian) who put their boots on the throat of Christian believers. In 250 Decius decided that *all* Christians had to pay homage to the Roman gods or be killed and he was as good as his evil words. This carnage became known as “The Decian Persecution” as it came directly from the Emperor himself. This persecution took the life of no less a personage than Pope St. Fabian. The persecution went so far as to prohibit Christian worship in the empire — period. Mercifully, Decius died one year after his edict had been in effect.

9. Valerian (253-260)

Valerian was a man whose reign (and reign of terror) got out of hand. Like Decius before him, he continued the killing of Christians, including such great saints as Lawrence the Deacon, Denis of Paris, Cyprian and Pope Sixtus II. However, he was continuously at war with the Persians, who wound up capturing the emperor who died in their captivity — which sent shockwaves throughout the empire, and was a harbinger that the Empire itself was beginning to show signs of dry-rot.

10. Diocletian (284-305)

Even worse than Decius, Diocletian brought about the “Great Persecution” which took the killing of Christians to all areas of the far-flung Roman empire. In one refreshing change of pace, Diocletian, who created so many early-martyr/saints by his sheer blood-lust, actually retired from office toward the end of his life. However, the damage was done and his pogrom against Christians was one of the all-time worst.

11. Constantius and Galerius (early 4th century)

These count as one selection, as the former ruled in the West and the latter in the East. Both continued a reign of terror which included, at the very least, the destruction of Christian churches, as well as the destruction of Christians

themselves. However, Christian history has been kinder to Constantius since (a) he was “married” to St. Helena, who found the True Cross in the Holy Land, and (b) was the father of Constantine the Great (272–337), whose Edict of Milan in 313 established “tolerance” of Christianity — and, according to legend, he was baptized by St. Eusebius of Nicomedia. His father, however, was not, as some have maintained, a “closet-Christian” — and, worse, Galerius made up for Constantius’ diffidence on Christianity with all-out full-bore persecutions.

It’s worth noting that this list is incomplete on a number of levels. For one, the transition from one emperor to another was almost never a smooth transition of power in pre-Christian Rome. For another, there were often several competing combatants for the throne, sometimes lasting years at a time. Finally, there was the “tetrarchy,” where there were four rulers simultaneously.

But these are the men who, for good or ill, ruled the Roman empire while it tried its best to put-down the “heresy” of Christianity. We can all be glad that ultimately, by God’s grace, they failed, and Christianity went from being a persecuted sect to the state religion by the end of the 4th century.

Truly the words of Christ have been fulfilled. Christians of the New Testament church have been severely persecuted through the years. The church has for its foundation the blood of the martyrs.

The persecution of the church started right here in Acts chapter 4.

IV. The Charge- 18-22

We could call this section the power of personal commitment. The apostles are going to be told they are no longer allowed to teach or preach in the name of Jesus. The NT Christian has long obeyed the powers that be. We are people of submission and people of obedience. However, when we are forced to disobey the Word of God or participate in immorality, we will be civilly disobedient.

Paul, later in Romans, makes this clear. However, we will obey God first, as Peter says.

Rom 13:1-5

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

NIV

Verse 18 is a direct command not to proselytize. The Great Commission garners our obedience first and foremost. It's never our goal to bring punishment or unwarranted attention from the authorities, but our first responsibility is to obey God. If we are told we cannot preach or have Bibles, we will not obey. These biblical standards are being challenged today by ungodly governmental parties. There are laws being made to which I will not adhere.

In verse 18 the word **ordered** is **paraggello**, which means command, charge or declare. This is to transmit a message. The apostles were point blank told not to teach or preach in the name of Jesus.

Verses 19-20: Peter and John tell the rulers to decide for themselves if it is right, in the sight of God, to obey them or God. No matter what you decide, just know that we cannot obey you. Notice two key phrases.

- **In the sight- enopion**, a derivative of **optanomai**. This means in the face of, in the presence of, or before. We can't obey you because we are always in God's presence. God is watching what we do!
- **Unable- ou dunamai**, This is not, "*we won't obey.*" This is translated as, "*we are unable to obey.*" **In other words, the apostles were not disobedient to man but being obedient to God.** Paul was told the same thing in Acts 22 by Ananias.

Acts 22:14-16

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have **seen** and **heard**."

NIV

The mystery of commitment: I say it is a mystery because, so few actually have it, and some do not even want it. Why is it that so many people are moved with emotion and empathy for Christ while others never shed a tear, or have a concern for others, the lost, or the world in general.

Verse 19 reveals to us some interesting facts about the new empowered apostles.

1. They had courage.
2. The kingdom was more than life to them.
3. They were men of passion.
4. They were men of obedience.
5. They could not be intimidated.

What was behind this awesome sense of personal commitment? Why were they willing to stand and not back down?

1. They had been with Jesus v.13.

2. Verse 8 tells us they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we have all we need; we just need commitment to the cause. Spiritual fortitude to fulfill our calling.

Verse 21: The Apostles were **threatened**. The word used here is **prosapeileo**, which means to threaten further in a menacing way. This is what happens when we do not obey man. If we will not stop what we are doing we are **threatened**. If you want a good fight just threaten free people.

* Let it be known – I am narrow minded. I am committed to the cause of Christ. I stand with Peter and John. I believe John 14:6.

* The disciples understand now that Christ came to save individuals and not start a military revolution.

Be committed to kingdom work–

The man had been healed, and no one could deny it. The miracle and healing were public and obviously a God thing.

* Be committed when you see kingdom growth. Don't compromise your held beliefs.

Illustration: I had an old article that was sent to me recently. It's about compromise. Here is how Billy Graham answered the question about "getting with the times" in his former column, "My Answer."

Comment: The Laws of God do not Change: "These are the times of change, and beliefs, values, and doctrines. I believe that your work would be more effective if you kept this in mind and updated your theology." A. E.

Answer: I couldn't disagree with you more. The Bible emphatically teaches that, although times and fashions change,

that God's laws are unchangeable. The Bible says: I am the Lord, I change not-Malachi 3:6. He is the pivotal fixed point in the universe. An orderly society and an orderly universe must be geared to him. You say that everything changes, but this is not true. Scientific formulae are unchangeable. Man must conform to universal laws if he wants to survive. The multiplication tables have never changed. The alphabet is unchanged. The stars move in fixed, prescribed courses. The sun moves in an unchangeable orbit, and if it does change, we would either freeze or be burned to death. The calendar does not change. The tides do not change. God's will for mankind does not change. His judgments do not change. His commandments do not change. God's love and mercy do not change. Hell does not change, and heaven is unchanged. I am more concerned with updating my dedication to God than in updating my theology. The thing that needs to change is human nature, not the nature of God.

I must say that I would love to live in a spiritual world where the glory of God was so manifested that I would not have to answer questions from people that don't see the glory of God or who complain about the will of God as if what is happening is my fault. God was the main one who healed the man, not the apostles; the apostles were just doing the will of God. The man was 40 years old. Why is that even mentioned? This was a grown man who's responsible for himself and exercised his faith. Some people will complain even about a man being healed by God himself.

V. The Report, The Prayer, and Praise: Verse 23-31

When threats come, what should you do? Cling to the Community. This should be natural. This may be the number one reason for lack of commitment to Christ today.

1. Churches that do not have a community or a relationship base lose their members in persecution.
2. Personal commitment to a family increases your chances of staying committed to Christ.
3. The community creates – guilt in sin, encouragement in trouble – growth in relationships, etc.
4. The community is where we pass on our beliefs in God’s word, love for our God and hopes for the future.
5. Support is everything in times of persecution. You need your “own people.” A church family is what God intended. This *lone wolf Christianity* of today is not biblical.

Illustration: Show me a Christian who is nominal and disconnected from the community and I will show you an uncommitted Christian. That *Christian* is probably not a Christian.

Verse 24: When threats come - Pray

Chapter 4 looks like this when outlined by Wiersbe.

1. The Apostles: Defending His name.
2. The Council: Opposing His name.
3. The Church: Calling on His name.

~The rulers and elders used their earthly power and authority to demand compliance –

~The apostles and the church used heavenly power and heavenly authority to rejoice in God’s will.

Verse 24: Remember that Luke loves to record prayers.

One of the greatest prayers in the Bible.

1. Notice the urgency of the prayer- “on their release.” You must have a place to which you can go. Do you have church people to help you? Go to them quickly. **All the people** raised their voices. This is why we send prayer requests out. We want all the sheep to pray. In a crisis, we run to report and get to praying.

2. Notice the importance of prayer :

To begin with, it was a prayer that was born out of witness and service for the Lord. Peter and John had just come in from “the trenches,” and the church met to pray in order to defeat the enemy. Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or party. There is little sense of urgency and danger because most of us are comfortable in our Christian walks.

If more of God's people were witnessing for Christ in daily life, there would be more urgency and blessing when the church meets for prayer.

-Wiersbe

It makes a difference when the church knows that we “**need**” to pray, instead of we “**have**” to.

3. The body was united – all the church lifted their voices together. Division in the body robs the church of prayer.

4. They did not pray for God to kill their enemies or hurt them – they prayed to the God of creation – the Sovereign God.

* Prayer changes us – not God.

5. Verse 24-25 – They prayed to the Creator. If He created the world, He can control events that happen in it.

6. Verse 25 - They prayed the Word! Very effective praying! Praying the Word puts you in the will of God as you pray. Have you ever thought of this?

John 15: 7-8

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

* The Word and prayer always go together. The church knew that their circumstances were directly caused and affected because of the prophetic word.

7. Verse 25 mentions the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Word, and God's will never contradict each other. Stay Committed! A Spirit led prayer originates with the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit means to be led by the Spirit.

The people prayed Psalm 2: The very thing that was happening to them, at that very moment, was spoken of in Psalm 2. They lined up their circumstances with the prophetic Word. That's a great life application.

Ps 2:1-4

2 Why do the heathen **rage**, and the people imagine a **vain** thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

KJV

Greek: Phruasso, rage. Hebrew: Ragash, tumultuous, rage- to snort– to neigh like a horse, to prance or stamp the ground, to put on lofty airs, to be arrogant, haughty insolent, man's pride in other words. The nations rage, snort and try to overthrow God.

Ragash- to plot, to devise, to plan, “imagine vain things.” Vain is empty, ineffective, useless, fraudulent, empty, and lacking. “The Kings take their stand” - stand: “they assemble together.” Why do they gang up on God?

Psalm 2 says be wise, fear and kiss the Son lest God be angry with you and you be destroyed in (your way) He is “The Way.”

Ps 2:12

12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

KJV

*** Take refuge in Him – That’s what the church did!!!**

This great word of encouragement the church was using came through the mouth of David and by the Holy Spirit. *That’s called inspiration with illumination.*

Here again, we have an apostle and the biblical historian using the Old Testament to teach NT spiritual principles of the faith. Any preacher who thinks the OT is irrelevant is irrelevant himself, lost, ignorant, or an **idiotes**. That’s Greek for idiot.

There is nothing new in 2025. The **ethnos** (Nations, Gentiles or heathens) plot and gather against God. How ridiculous? Their plotting, standing, snorting, and raging are said to be futile imaginations before the Lord. Vanity.

We, as submissive Christians humble ourselves before God; the nations stand against God and His will. The Word and Spirit are not their guides. What a contrast. A group of **idiotes** have a show every day where they spew, snort, stomp, and stand against the Messiah on what they call the View. And one day they will perish from the way and experience the full kindled wrath of the Messiah. One solid hour of vain imaginations. And we all know what snorts, and spits and stomps, right? Here in the South we call them stubborn mules.

We are not to just hate though. We are to pray for them to kiss the Son before it's too late. However, Luke is very direct. Look at verse 27.

Verse 27-28 – Remember in your trials, God is sovereign. What Luke says here is also the plan of God. Luke continues with this prayer of the people.

Control hatred and anger in persecution because God is in control. They prayed for God's work to continue and for God to consider their opposition (What they did not pray is also important).

~ People often tell me that calling names from the pulpit is not nice. The people called names as they prayed. Herod, Pilate, and all the Jews get called out. Even the Gentiles that participated were called out. I like it.

The KJV has a very accurate translation here with the word child instead of servant.

Acts 4:27

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,
KJV

“In fact” is **aletheia**, which is the word for truth. Luke makes is clear that the **truth** was that the prophetic words of Psalm 2 came true and the Jews, Herod, Pilate, the people, and the Gentiles all gathered together against God's anointed child. Jesus is the **anointed (chrio)** One.

Verse 29 & 30 show their attitudes and heart. Acts 5:15 shows us how God answered their prayers.

Verse 28: The killing of Jesus and all that God's hand wanted done was predestined. Many Christians have a problem with the sovereignty of God.

What does verses 27 and 28 sound like to you? If God were not sovereign, you would be on your way to hell. You were saved by the sovereign will of God, but don't want to live by the Sovereign will of God. God gets His will accomplished without ever violating the human will.

Verse 29: A great prayer to pray when you are being persecuted. Lord, consider the threats against you and allow us to speak the message with boldness. Just Awesome!

Verse 30: Lord, allow these things while you do your things. We are to just do our part and then watch God do His part. If you don't get the sovereignty of God, then just live out verse 29 and 30. Pray that you will do your job correctly, and you know God will take care of His job correctly.

Verse 31: The last verse in this section tells us that the prayer in verse 29 was answered. What else could we hope for? There was a visible expression or manifestation of God's approval. The filling of the HS, and the people began to share the message, which is exactly what they were told not to do by the religious rulers.

- God moves.
- God fills.
- The Word is preached.

Be personally committed to:

The Gospel

Kingdom Work

The Community of Faith

Illustrate Martin Luther's personal commitment:

- Life Story
- In my Greek NT there are references to Luther and his work of translating the Greek into German. If Luther had submitted to the pressure of the Papacy, we would not have his life's work – one man, but he had the power of personal commitment.