

A Word from Pastor Chuck



The Man God Uses—part 5

Pastor Chuck is recovering well from two mini-strokes and has returned to teaching. He is thankful to everyone for their prayers.

Persecution

Since the time of Christ, His followers have faced persecution and are still targeted all around the world. We as believers must be ready to endure suffering for Christ as the early believers did.

The fourth chapter of the Book of Acts outlines the beginning of the persecution against the church. The Jewish religious leaders had just gotten rid of Jesus—or so they thought—and tried to silence His followers. Why did they oppose the Gospel?

Opposed to Christ

The governing body of the Jewish religion, the Sanhedrin, was made up of two rival sects: the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were pure materialists. They only believed in things they could experience with their physical senses—not angels, spirits, or life after death. They certainly did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. In essence, they were humanists.

In contrast, the Pharisees did believe in life after death. They were more zealous about the Jewish law than the Sadducees. However, both saw Christ's teachings as a threat.

The Pharisees

The Pharisees persecuted Jesus because they believed that He broke the Mosaic Law. Jesus refused to acknowledge their man-made traditions. He healed on the Sabbath, did not quote the rabbis when He taught, associated with sinners, and drew huge crowds everywhere He went. Worst of all, in their minds, Jesus revealed that He was God.

The Sadducees

The Sadducees' basic problem stemmed from Jesus' teaching on the resurrection of the dead. There is nothing more disturbing to a materialist than being told that when he dies he will go to a place where he cannot take his money. Imagine their dismay when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead!

The Resurrection

The Sadducees thought that the crucifixion had finally gotten rid of Jesus, but now

Peter and John were claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. On top of that, as we read in Acts 3, the disciples were giving Jesus credit for healing the lame man in the temple. As much as they wanted to, the Sadducees couldn't deny this fact because the proof—the lame man—was walking, talking, and praising God in their midst.

The heart of the Gospel, that Jesus has risen from the dead and that He empowers His believers to do the works He did, was literally staring them in the face.

The teachings of Jesus also robbed the Sadducees of their livelihood—charging people money to follow a fabricated religion. If the people believed the message of the apostles—that's God's grace was free to all who simply believe in Christ—then the Sadducees' whole industry would crumble. Being materialists, they were not seeking the truth. They simply wanted to continue with business as usual; in which case, they had to stamp out this teaching of a resurrection.

This led the Sadducees to imprison Peter and John. Luke tells us in Acts 3:1 that it had been about 3:00 p.m. when Peter and John went up to the temple—where they healed a lame man and preached the Gospel—so it was probably about 5:00 p.m. by the time they were arrested. Notice that, in just two hours, about 5,000 men had come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

The next day, Peter and John were brought before the Sadducees who asked, **“By what power or by what name have you done this?”** (Acts 4:7b).

This was an ingenious question designed to trap Peter and John with an Old Testament law from Deuteronomy 13:1-5, which says that false prophets—specifically those who commit a sign and then urge God's people to worship other gods—should be put to death.

The healing of the lame man was quite clearly a sign, and everyone in the city was in wonder over it. If Peter and John stuck to

their claim that this miracle was performed by Jesus, then the Sadducees, interpreting Jesus to be some other god, could have them put to death.

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Nevertheless, the two apostles boldly professed that the healing was **“by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead”** (Acts 4:10b).

At that time, the disciples were threatened and released. A little while later, in Acts 12, King Herod began killing Christians to please the Jewish leaders. Again Peter was imprisoned for his faith, but the Lord supernaturally released him.

Peter encouraged the persecuted church to keep their hope in Christ and in their eternal reward: **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love”** (1 Peter 1:6-8a).

Early church historians record that Peter eventually did die a martyr's death in 64 AD. Since then, countless believers have been ridiculed for their beliefs and persecuted or even killed for preaching the Gospel. And today, the man God uses must be willing to suffer persecution—even death—for his faith in Jesus Christ. 🙏

Note: This article was edited by permission and taken from the book, The Man God Uses, by Pastor Chuck Smith.