

# THE CHURCH STANDS FIRM



**+** **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

When Peter and John were arrested and warned not to preach Jesus, they responded that they could not stop proclaiming the risen Savior.

**+** **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 4

**+** **SETTING:**

Much like Jesus Himself, the apostles soon faced hostility from worldly leaders. The Jewish leaders, in particular, were threatened by those who followed Jesus. Jesus's disciples were seen as a rebellious sect who would not submit to the Jewish leaders. In light of the recent healing of the man born lame, Jewish leaders arrested the apostles and questioned them the next day. Peter and John used these questions to once again proclaim the truth about Jesus.

# DAY 1

## READ:

**Acts 4:5-12**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Acts 4:10**

## NOTES



### **KEY DOCTRINE #83: NEW IDENTITY OF THE BELIEVER**

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Ephesians 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The testimony of a transformed life is a powerful force. Imagine how you might have responded should you have known or seen the man who was lame begging at the Beautiful Gate each day, only to suddenly find him healed—leaping for joy and praising God. You would have likely been overwhelmed at the power and salvation God offered.

Peter said the same kind of transformation that healed the man has come to all Christians. Those saved by Jesus have been healed of a far deeper malady than lameness. Their sins have been forgiven and their dead heart made alive.

In one of his letters, Peter described all Christians as a royal priesthood, a nation of holy people who proclaim the glory and praise of the One who drew us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Once dead in sin and separated from God, now Christians give praise to God for the salvation Jesus accomplished on the cross. Those who know someone whose life has been radically changed by Christ are compelled by the power of God. In this way, those far from God see the gospel lived out in the transformed life of a follower of Jesus.

**What do those who see your life learn about Jesus?**

# DAY 2

## READ:

Acts 4:5-12

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 4:12

NOTES

Evangelism and missions hinge on the claim that salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. If salvation and forgiveness of sins could be found in another way, then why would Christians need to point people to Jesus? If Jesus were merely one among many ways that people could find hope and purpose, then evangelism would be a waste of time. We might talk to people about why we love and follow Jesus, but we wouldn't need to call them to faith and repentance if they could find salvation in another way.

But the apostles were clear: Salvation only comes through faith in Jesus because He is the only One who has been appointed by God as the cornerstone for salvation. God did not devise multiple cornerstones for salvation, but only one. Since this is true, Christians have a mission to make sure that all people everywhere have a chance to hear the gospel of Jesus. We live at a time when national and international missions have never been easier; we have access to modern transportation and translation options that would have been unimaginable decades ago. These resources, backed by the power of the Holy Spirit, empower God's people to proclaim the singular name by which all people must be saved—Jesus.

**How are you involved in getting the gospel to those who have never heard it?**

# DAY 3

## READ:

**Acts 4:13-22**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Acts 4:18-20**

NOTES

What would you do if someone told you that you could not talk about Jesus? Most have not faced such a reality, but many Christians around the world have. Martyrdom is common. Oppression has been normative. In many parts of the world, even today, the testimony that Jesus is King brings with it a death sentence, or at least the death of relationships with family and friends. Both the government and individuals are apt to tell Christians to stop speaking about the name of Jesus or else they will suffer. What are Christians to do in such a place? They follow the model of the apostles here and entrust themselves to God and continue to speak.

The fact that many of us don't live in such an environment brings challenges as well. If we are not being forced to remain silent about Jesus, then why is it so easy for many of us to fail to speak about Him? In places where persecution isn't the norm and Christians do not suffer harm for talking about Jesus, we should use that freedom to openly and compellingly share the good news.

**What are some ways people face persecution today for telling the good news of Jesus?**

# DAY 4

## READ:

**Acts 4:23-31**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Acts 4:23-24**

NOTES

When Peter and John were released, they immediately went back and reported to the other brothers and sisters in the church about what had gone on. The persecution they endured would have certainly alarmed these early Christians, since the expectation would be that the threats and opposition would soon threaten the entire church. But the apostles understood that the weight they were carrying wasn't theirs alone. They modeled what Paul would later write, carrying one another's burdens to "fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Burden-bearing was a hallmark of the New Testament church. Whether it was suffering, pain, complexity, persecution, or sin, the people of God confessed their need for God's help and the support of others. The church rallied around those who were burdened to lend them strength in their hour of need. Often in modern times, we are too private about the pain we are carrying and assume that others either don't want to know or are too burdened themselves to help. We then keep things locked in private, when the community of the church is the best means of help and prayer. As God's people, we should seek out ways to allow others to bear our burdens and actively find ways to support those around us who are burdened.

**What burdens could you be sharing with other believers for mutual encouragement?**

# DAY 5

## READ:

**Acts 4:23-31**

## FOCAL PASSAGE:

**Acts 4:29-30**

## NOTES

People often find themselves rattled by the complexity of life in this world. The pervasive, twenty-four-hour news cycle brings to the forefront story after story of chaos and pain. It's not just that bad things happen, but it seems that the world is often hostile to Jesus, the church, and the moral principles that guide a Christian's life.

The apostles faced the same reality. In spite of all that God was doing in their day, they still faced opposition. God could have stopped such oppression in light of the spread of His church, but that was not the case. The Christians did not ask God to give them protection against persecution, but that God would give them strength to continue preaching with boldness and that the Holy Spirit would continue to help them heal the sick and perform miracles.

The ongoing threats should remind Christians today that persecution is to be expected for the people of God. The apostles set a good model here—they pointed back to King David, who recognized that the nations would always rage against God's people. Until we reach heaven or Christ returns, Christians should expect opposition. We must trust God to give us boldness in the face of evil.

**How is God calling you to trust Him in the middle of opposition or evil?**

## VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small: Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."<sup>1</sup>

—Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

# GROUP

NOTES

## VOICES from THE CHURCH

"The gospel is a story of what has happened in history for the whole world. This kind of message needs to be announced as truth by witnesses. While arrogant and aggressive approaches to evangelism have been only too real in modernity, this does not abolish the task to tell the true story of the world and to seek to convince others of its truth and to aim at response, conversion, and discipleship. This is not an act of dogmatic arrogance but simply the discharge of the task that we have been chosen to do. Not to discharge this task is betrayal."<sup>2</sup>

—Michael W. Goheen  
and Timothy Sheridan

## POINT 1: God's people testify about the risen Savior (Acts 4:8-12).

Those who experience Jesus's love, through the Holy Spirit, testify about Jesus's death and resurrection.



**How can you more boldly proclaim Christ with the Spirit's power?**

## KEY DOCTRINE #83: NEW IDENTITY OF THE BELIEVER

When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Ephesians 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, becoming more and more like Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Believers proclaim Jesus as the cornerstone—salvation is found only through Him.

## POINT 2: God's people refuse to be silenced about the risen Savior (Acts 4:18-22).

In spite of the world's threats, believers continue to testify to Christ in obedience to God.



**What happens when we fear people rather than God?**

Despite threats, those who witness the Messiah's work can't stop talking about Him.

**?** From Day 3: **What are some ways people face persecution today for telling the good news of Jesus?**

### **POINT 3: God's people pray for boldness to proclaim the risen Savior** (Acts 4:23-31).

The body of Christ prays for each other to receive God's power to pursue kingdom objectives.

**?** **How do we cultivate more corporate prayer for the work of God's mission in our lives?**

In any service to God, we respond in obedience through prayer and proclaiming Christ, but God is the One working in hearts and changing lives.

**?** **What are ways we can respond in obedience to God's plan to bring salvation to others who don't yet know Him?**

## **MY RESPONSE**

Because we have experienced the great news of salvation through Jesus, we seek to tell all others about how they too can believe in Jesus and be forgiven of their sin.

- **HEAD:** Why does the truth of the resurrection compel Christians to speak about Jesus?
- **HEART:** In what ways can you confess that you haven't been bold for Jesus?
- **HANDS:** To whom in your life can you boldly share the good news of Jesus?



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### **VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY**

"Suffering . . . is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master . . . Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake.' . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."<sup>3</sup>

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
(1906–1945)