



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 4:1–31

“The Ultimate Allegiance and the Ultimate Response”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Let's turn to Acts chapter 4, and today I'm going to simply read verses 1 through verse 31, without comment for our Scripture reading, since this is a little bit longer section than we ordinarily read and study in our expositions. Pentecost has taken place. A few days after Pentecost, Peter has healed by the grace of God, the lame man through the name of Jesus Christ. He has preached his sermon, in which he has called upon Israel to repent, that they might be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, and that the promises found in the Old Testament might be fulfilled, inclusive of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the kingdom that follows.

Now in chapter 4, after this preaching we read.

“And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees came upon them. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day, for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand. And it came to pass in the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst they asked, ‘By what power or by what name have ye done this?’ Then Peter, filled with the

Holy Ghost said unto them, ‘Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled, and they [took] knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straightly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.’ And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them ‘Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people, for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed. And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, ‘Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, ‘Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. 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. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word. By stretching forth thy hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

One question that might come as you read this message is the stress on the filling of the Holy Spirit. In fact, this morning someone asked me the question, “Why are they filled with the Holy Spirit when on the Day of Pentecost they were filled with the Spirit? What is the point of being filled again or why is this reference made to it here?” The “filling of the Spirit” is an expression that ordinarily refers to enduement with spiritual power for specific tasks. It refers essentially, to the control of the Spirit of God, and in the context, it almost always refers to the control of the Holy Spirit for the performance of particular tasks, often for the preaching of the Word of God, often for witnessing, and sometimes for the performance of some miraculous miracle. And that of course, seems to be the force of the word in this passage that we have read. “They spake the Word of God with boldness” and that is the product of the control, the special control, of the Holy Spirit. We are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ once and for all, but “filling with the Spirit.” Specific control for a specific task is something that a person as a Christian, may experience more than once, and of course, it’s desirable as occasion may demand it.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let’s bow together now for a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the word of God, and for the privilege of reading it, for we know that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. We thank Thee for the ministry of the word of God to us, for we recognize that the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to

build us up in our faith, and to transform us. We thank Thee for this day, and the opportunities of it, and we are grateful for the knowledge, that by Thy grace we may preach the word of God and know that the Holy Spirit is in the word, and uses the word as Thou dost will.

And, Lord, we pray as it is preached today, wherever it may be preached, not simply here, that the Holy Spirit may accomplish Thy perfect will through the preaching. May there be faithful preaching of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the forgiveness of sins through him. Bring conviction to us as we need conviction and then, Lord, bring the facts of the gospel to the attention of all outside of Christ, and may there be response; admission of our need, a fleeing for refuge to the one who has shed blood for sins, and the reception of the gift of eternal life.

We thank Thee too, Lord, for the promises of the Christian life, for the word of God, for the presence of the Holy Spirit who guides us, and leads us, and teaches us the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the assurance of Thy presence through the experiences of life, and, Lord, we pray that we may have the experience of Thy presence with us in the trials of life as we face them. We especially pray for the sick and ill, and for others who need, it seems, special ministry from Thee at this time. Lord, we commit them into Thy hands. We pray that Thou wilt minister to them in a way that will draw them closer to Thee, and give them deliverance. And Father we pray for our country, for the whole body of Christ as well. We give Thee thanks for this day, the Lord's Day, in which we recognize the preeminence of Jesus Christ, and worship Thee through him.

We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today in the exposition of Acts chapter 4, verse 1 through verse 31, is “The Ultimate Allegiance and the Ultimate Response.” The interruption of Peter's preaching by priestly persecution illustrates one of the great truths of divine ministry. The Apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy, the second one, comments upon the principle when he says, “And yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” So we're not surprised when the apostles, preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and laying stress upon the resurrection, should have some

experiences of human persecution. In fact, this should be the experience of the Christian church always, and when the Christian church is not being persecuted, generally it is not being as fruitful as it often has been in its history.

When I was studying in Scotland many years ago, one of my teachers said, “It’s a terrible thing when the church is content to cultivate in offensiveness.” And he went on to point out that, “It’s the natural thing for the church, in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to be an offense to the people to whom they are ministering, because the Gospel itself is an offense to the natural man. It tells him, in effect, that all that he has, and all that he does is unacceptable to God, so far as his eternal salvation is concerned. He must be born again.” Eventually, of course, that kind of ministry is fruitful, and we can expect it to be very successful, although the offensiveness accompanies it, fruitfulness also accompanies it.

I have a friend. He’s still preaching in the Southern Baptist Convention. He’s spent most of his life ministering in Alabama and Georgia, and many years ago I was in several conferences with him in southern Mississippi. And in the course of one of his messages, he made some comments concerning Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and the fiery furnace. And you remember the story. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the image of King Nebuchadnezzar and, of course, those who were the enemies of these three Hebrews, went to the king and told him about it, and he gave them a second chance. He told them if they would bow down to the image at the proper time, that things would be all right, but they would not budge from their conviction. They, of course, worshiped the true God, and they were not going to bow down to a false god or an idol. And the king then threw them into the fire, and my preacher friend said, “And then the king found out when they were thrown in the fire, and the fire did not burn them at all, but rather, when he looked in, he was startled to see a fourth person walking in the midst of the fire, liken to the Son of God, the king found out from that experience that those who will not bow or budge, will not burn either.” Well, that is the experience of believers in Christ. They are going to experience persecution when they stand for the truth, but at the same time, God has covenanted to take care of them, and that is

precisely what happened to Peter and John, and the other early Christians as they faced persecution following the preaching of Jesus and the resurrection.

Peter has just finished his ministry according to the historian Luke’s account. And as they were speaking about the resurrection and the Lord Jesus, the Sadducees, the captain of the Temple, the priests, and others came upon them. They were very much annoyed at the things that Peter was preaching, and attempting to teach the people, because he’d preached Jesus and the resurrection from the dead, so “they laid hold upon them, and put them in prison overnight, because it was in the afternoon.” Now the arrest, of course, was caused by the fact that the apostles were preaching Jesus and the resurrection from the dead. The Sanhedrin didn’t like this for several reasons. The Sanhedrin was composed of Sadducees largely, who were the wealthy aristocrats, the connaborationists. They wanted the preserve the status quo. They were the establishment in Jerusalem, and what Peter represented at this time, was an attack on the theological position of these men who has authority. Furthermore, we learn from other parts of the New Testament, this particular book actually, from chapter 23 and verse 8, that the Sadducees, who were the leading men in the Sanhedrin, did not accept the doctrine of the resurrection, and in fact, did not even believe in angel or spirit. And, furthermore, those who were teaching, Peter, and John, and the rest, were not rabbis.

If you think for a moment what preaching the resurrection meant, you can understand how upset the authorities were, because the resurrection first of all, meant spiritual revolution. It meant, of course, that there was coming a day when the Lord Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit, after the resurrection from the dead, would settle the questions of inequities, and injustices that had existed in the society, and that there was coming a time of ultimate judgment. That’s one of the things that the apostles preached too, incidentally. The Apostle Paul, later on in Athens preaches, “He has appointed a day in which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, whereof he has given assurance in that he has raised him from the dead.” And those men saw the fundamental truth that if Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead by God the Father, then there is coming a time when rights and wrongs are going to be adjusted, and therefore, this was a

revolutionary kind of preaching, spiritually revolutionary, in that the time is coming when the truth of God will be ultimately the judge of all men.

Of course, it was not simply a spiritual revolution. It was a political revolution too, in the sense that all of the wrongs committed by the authorities in the name of God falsely were going to be righted too some day. And as a matter of fact, even economic revolution, because if this doctrine were allowed to permeate a nation, then all kinds of transformation would take place in that society. You can see, that the apostles were not very much affected by the popular doctrine of our day, and that is, that we ought to be relevant to the conditions of the people. They didn't think about relevance. They thought about what was the word of God and their responsibility to faithfully preach it. In fact, they were doing precisely what Paul told Timothy to do, and that was “to preach the word in season, and out of season.” That is, the word of God is to be preached regardless of how it may affect the society in which the word of God is. So one can see right here in the beginning, that the ultimate allegiance of the apostles lay in the doctrine that had come to them through the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, now, the Sanhedrin has called them up before them, and they are now going to appear before “the rulers, the elders, the scribes, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest.” So all of the leading authorities in the land are gathered together in their meeting the next morning, and when they all gathered together in their room, you can imagine them singing first of all, before they brought them in, “Hail, hail, the gang's all here,” and so the apostles are going to be brought in before this crowd, and one immediately thinks, “How are these fishermen going to be able to stand against the political and spiritual aristocracy of the land.” And of course, I don't know anything about the media then, but if there was such a thing as the media then, they would be there too. So here are Peter and John. They are just poor fishermen, and those disciples, and they are called in before the highest authorities in the land. How will they do?

Well, the first question that comes to them is the question asked them by the leaders, “By what power, or by what name have ye done this?” They couldn’t accuse them of being under the control of demons, because they didn’t believe in demons, and so since they didn’t accept the existence of angels and spirits, they couldn’t accuse them, as they might have accused them, of being led by the demons and the false gods. So they asked the question, “By what power or in what name have you done this?” And Peter, the spokesman for those who are in prison, as he stands before them, filled with the Holy Spirit that is given at this particular moment, words to say, as Jesus said, “When you appear before the rulers and leaders, don’t worry about what you are going to say, because at that moment, the Holy Spirit will give you words to say.” And one can have no objection to the things that Peter said at this point. He said, “Ye rulers of the people, and chiefs of Israel, if we’re examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole. Well, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, this man has been made whole.”

But Peter didn’t simply say that. He reminded them of their guilt. He said, “Whom ye crucified,” and he reminded them of what God had done, “whom God raised from the dead. By him this man stands before you whole.” And he did not stop with that. He said, “You claim to be followers of the word of God. I remind you that your own word in the one hundred and eighteenth Psalm, said that there was a stone which would be set at nought of the builders, and that this stone would become the head of the corner, and I want you to know that Jesus Christ is the stone promised in the Old Testament, and he has become the head of the corner, and you have despised him.” And then coming to the climactic text, the twelfth verse, he says, “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Now, what a bold statement for a simple fisherman to make in front of the leaders of the people, and of the media.

Now, I’d like you to look for just a moment at that twelfth verse, because it is a magnificent statement on the part of Peter. He says, “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none

other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” I’ve often made comment about this, and others have too in Believers Chapel, because it’s one of the great doctrines of the word of God, repeated over, and over, and over again; not simply in the New Testament, but repeated also in the Old Testament, and it is essentially this; the intolerance that is manifested in God’s truth. The arrogance, men would say, manifested in the revelation of God’s truth. The intolerance. Let’s think about that for a moment. We live in a day in which it is popular to be tolerant. Tolerance is regarded as a virtue. Actually, tolerance under certain circumstances may be a virtue. Sometimes it may be a very big sin against God. And when we tolerate other doctrine, we’re not guilty of exercising some virtue approved by God. We are guilty of compromise with the word of God itself. Listen to some of the statements of Scripture, which you know as well as I. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. Neither is there salvation in any other.” The prophets repeat the same doctrine. They say that the Lord God is the true God, and there is no other one beside him. And so Peter, in a very, very difficult situation, very boldly states that, “There is salvation in none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and he alone is the way to God.”

One of the characteristic things of the false gods and false doctrine, is the tolerance that characterizes them. If, for example, in the days of the apostles, and before the days of the apostles in the days of the prophets, if you would ask the worshipers of the gods of Egypt, “What about the gods of Nineveh?” They would have said, “Well of course, the Ninevites may be saved by the gods of Nineveh, but we’re saved by the gods of Egypt.” So the gods of Egypt tolerated the gods of Nineveh, and so on. In other words, gods tolerate gods. That’s characteristic today. When you talk to individuals who do not have Christian doctrine, they are tremendously upset if you affirm that there is only one way of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. You are accused of intolerance. Their god is a very tolerant god, and the gods, well, the gods of the Mohammedan, the god of the Mohammedans is a very tolerant god. The god of the Hindus is a very tolerant god. The god of the

Buddhists is a very tolerant god, and so on. Those who worship Moses or Moses' doctrine, they're very tolerant of others. In fact, it's quite customary today for people to say, “Well, Moses and the doctrine of the Old Testament with the Law is the way of salvation for one people, but for Gentiles, well, the Christian doctrine will do for them.

So Christianity is good for the Gentiles. Moses and his doctrine is good for the Jewish people.” All of this in the name of tolerance. Surely, you cannot really believe that salvation rests only in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the reasons, of course, why those gods tolerate the other gods, is that all of these gods have the same father, and being related to the same father, I speak, of course, of Satan himself, they naturally are tolerant of one another, but the God of the Scriptures is a God who insists that is absolutely unique. In fact, in the Old Testament revelation, the Lord God said to Moses, “Tell the people of Israel this truth too. You shall have no other gods before me.” And then of course, in the New Testament, we've already repeated the texts that speak of the exclusive position of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the same God who said to Moses, “You shall have no other gods before me.” He is an exclusive God.

Peter is only preaching the doctrine of divine revelation. “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Positively, of course, as a necessary consequence of this, salvation is in Christ, and so everything that is necessary for salvation is in him. If you have any questions about whether he is able to save you, maybe you're thinking, “Well, I'm not really sure that he is the Son of God.” Well, he is no Arian Christ. He is very God of very God. He is truly God, just as much God as the Father is God, and the Spirit is God, and yet we worship one God who subsists in three persons. If you think, for example, “Well, I've persecuted the Christian faith, and I wonder if he could save me,” I remind you that he saved Saul of Tarsus. If you think, “I have denied the Lord Jesus, I have denied the Christian faith, I have fought against it,” I remind you that one of his apostles was the Apostle Peter who also, in a moment of trial, denied the Lord Jesus Christ. If you say, for example, “Well, I've doubted the Christian faith, and I've doubted it so often,” I remind you that Thomas the apostle was a doubter,

and he too was saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps you were thinking, “Well, I’m just the worst sinner that a sinner could possibly be.” Well, it was the Apostle Paul was it not, who claimed to be the chief of sinners, and also saved as a testimony to the depths of the mercy of our great God in heaven. And my dear friend, he can even save you from your religion.

I like the statement made by an old woman who once was asked if she had religion, and she said, “No, thank God. I’ve lost that. It was nearly the death of me, but now I have Christ.” So when we have Christ, we have him who saves. While there’s no salvation in any other person, if we have him, there is salvation. Peter boldly proclaimed this to the Sanhedrin.

Well, the Sanhedrin found themselves in a very difficult position. They saw Peter and John. They saw they were bold men. They saw also, that while they were unlearned and ignorant men, nevertheless, they had beside them a man upon whom a notable miracle had been performed, and there was really nothing much that they could say, and so they were freed amid some threats. I want you to notice the effect of the preaching of Peter and Paul, these untaught laymen. “They saw the boldness of Peter and John, and they perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men.” That expression, “unlearned and ignorant men” in the Authorized Version is perhaps something of a mistranslation of the sense of these words. The first word really is a word that means that they had no education in the university. They were, in that sense, unlearned men. They had not gone through the schools. Now, the Lord Jesus, of course, had not gone through the schools too, and when he ministered, they marveled and they said, “How knoweth this man letters,” the word is built on the same root as this one, “How knoweth this man letters never having been taught?” And so they recognized in our Lord, that he knew the knowledge that one would have if he had been taught in the university but, nevertheless, he had never been.

There’s a marvelous passage in the Old Testament in Psalm 119, which the Psalmist, in this very lengthy Psalm gives us. He says in verse 99, “I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.” The greatest education that a person could possibly have, is education in the word of God,

and these individuals had been taught by the Lord God through the Spirit. They had come to be very, very intelligent men, and have given us literature that we have studied down through the years. In our theological schools, and in our universities what is studied today? Well of course, we study lots of things, but one of the things we study today, are the writings of the apostles. If you were to go to the University of Iowa or the University of Pennsylvania, or Harvard University or whatever university, you will discover that most of them have departments of religion, and in the departments of religion they study the books of the Scriptures, and the writings of the Apostle Paul, and the writings of the Apostle Peter, and the writings of the Apostle John. As a matter of fact, some of our leading scholars today, not simply study these things, but specialize in them. Think of a man giving his whole life to the study of the Johannine literature; the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and perhaps the book of Revelation. And here are men who are thought to be “unlearned and ignorant men.” Well, it was true. They had not been to the university, but you can be sure that they were very, very intelligent individuals.

The second word is a word, strictly speaking, from which we get the English word “idiots.” It’s the word *idiotae*. So when we read here of “unlearned and ignorant men,” if you wanted to just transliterate it, “unlearned and idiots.” But that, of course, is not the sense of the word originally. It was a word that simply meant, that they had not gone to the theological schools; that is, they were laymen, and the New English Bible renders this, I think accurately, by calling them “untrained laymen.” That’s what they were. Untrained laymen.

Now, two weeks ago I was in Toronto, and ministered the word over the weekend in a Bible conference, and some of the men who teach are laymen. One of the laymen came up to me, and gave me a book on the person of Christ which he had written. He is a man who’s been an outstanding officer in two of our very large corporations; a very, very interesting man, and also a very accomplished man who has retired, but he has studied the Scriptures, and he is an able minister of the word of God, and he has done this through his own personal study. This is not the first book that he has written. He has written a couple of books, and he gave me one of the books, and asked

me that I would read it. It's on the person of Christ. I brought it home with me. You know, it's possible for a person who studies the word of God to truly come to an understanding of its meaning, without attending a theological seminary. In fact, many people are corrupted by going to the theological seminary. Here are individuals who are untrained laymen, and they have come to understand the word of God. They're not seminary men, and they're not university men, but they've studied the divine revelation, and have been taught by the Holy Spirit, and they are effective servants for the Lord.

In fact, as those men stood with “Exhibit A” by their side, that lame man over forty years of age, who had now been healed, they produced wonder, they produced recognition, and they produced consternation in the lives and minds of those men in the Sanhedrin. Look at verse 13, “They marveled, and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.” So they actually produced wonder in these leaders in the nation. They also produced a recognition that it was a true work of God. Notice the sixteenth verse. “What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle has been done by them is manifest to all.” So recognition and consternation. What are we going to do? So they marveled, they recognized the reality of what had taken place, and then they themselves were all torn up within, because all of their world was reeling, in a sense, through what had happened through the Apostle Peter and others.

I mentioned in a sermon some time ago that many years ago I was in a Bible conference near Cleveland by the side of Lake Erie, and after the meetings we often would go over to a book table and look at the books which were for sale in that Bible conference. And after one of the meetings, I went over and was just looking at some of the literature, and there was a book there of sermons by a well-known preacher, and I picked it up and was just kind of thumbing through it, and I looked first at the Table of Contents. I was just running down the titles of the sermon, and I noticed one sermon entitled “The Man who Preached with his Feet.” Now, that sounded rather astonishing to me, a man preaching with his feet, so I quickly turned to see what text could you possibly use to preach on the subject “The Man who Preached with his Feet.” And this was the text. verse 14, “And beholding the

man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.” You see, here are men who have preached the word of God, and as a result of the ministry of the Lord God, a man who had formerly been lame is now standing healed; a man who has walked into the Temple leaping, and jumping, and praising God. What can you say against something like that? He is a man who preached with his feet.

The church, incidentally, is most effective when it can point to individuals who have been healed of the spiritual sicknesses. The greatest testimony to the preaching that would come from this pulpit, is the testimony of individuals in this audience who can say, “I was lost. The Gospel of Jesus Christ came to me. I responded to the Gospel, and by the grace of God, I am alive in Christ.” And with your lives testifying to what you say you believe, there could be no greater testimony to the doctrine proclaimed from this pulpit. That’s why it’s so important, incidentally, for you in this audience, who come to Believers Chapel and regularly attend here, to give testimony to the reality of the things that are preached in the pulpit. “A Man who Preached with his Feet.” How are you preaching? What kind of a message does the community that you come in contact with get from your life, from your words, from your actions?

Well, what can you do with men like this? Well, you acquit them, but they want to warn them, and so they say, “We cannot do anything about it, but we don’t want this to spread any more among the people, so let’s threaten them, and tell them not to speak any more in the name of Jesus.” Well, that’s one thing you should never do to a person who has the conviction that he’s preaching the word of God, for that only makes him more anxious to preach the word of God. So if you should come to me and say, “Now Dr. Johnson, I think you’re being a little too hard, and you should tone down your message a little bit,” there’s just something about a man who thinks he has a message from God. His back becomes a little bit stronger when you say something like that to him, and he just says, “I’ll just go out of my way to be sure to preach that, because it’s obvious that it’s having an effect.” So here they were warned, and Peter responded by saying, “Look, whether it’s right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, you judge for yourself.” They

couldn't answer anything like that. They would know they would have to say, “No, you have to obey God rather than men.” And he goes on to say, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” So the words, “Hush, don't use the name ‘Jesus’ in your preaching,” the apostles say, “Look, we've seen and heard certain things. We cannot help but preach those things.” What they in effect do, is appeal to a higher court than the Sanhedrin.

This is not simply something that apostles do. Socrates, as it is mentioned in Plato's *Apology*, when he was given an ultimatum and was told that if he did not tone his message down, and stop talking about the things that he was talking about, things would not go very well for him, he replied many years before the days of the apostles, “I shall obey God rather than you.” There's a story that the papal envoy threatened Martin Luther with what would follow if he persisted in his course, and warned him that in the end, he would not only suffer himself, but every one of his supporters would ultimately depart from him. “And where will you be then, Luther?” And Luther said, “Well, just exactly as I am now; in the hands of the Lord God.” So a servant of God is responsible to God, and he has the great support of being in the hands of God.

John Chrysostom, the great 4th Century preacher has a fine passage in which he talks about these two groups; the apostles on one hand, and the Sanhedrin on the other, and he said, “The Sanhedrists were at a loss. The apostles were joyful. The Sanhedrists were afraid to say what they thought. These were speaking out openly. The Sanhedrists were unable to say what they really saw and what they saw and heard. They are or I'm sorry. I put that wrong. “The Sanhedrists were dreading to have the report spread. These were unable not to say what they saw and heard. The Sanhedrists were not doing what they wanted. These were declaring precisely what they wanted.” And then Chrysostom winds up by saying, “Who then were in bonds and in danger?” And, of course, it was the Sanhedrists. They were the ones who were in bondage to their false ideas.

Well now, they set them free, and so the apostles make their way back to their own company as we read in verse 23, “And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.” This was a critical moment in the church's history. They

now know they are going to run counter to the highest authority in the land, and they are going to have difficulties, and so what do you do when you know that you are going to have difficulties, and you cannot turn from the course that is obviously the right course? To whom shall you appeal? Well, they appealed to God, and that, of course, is what we should do. They recognized the power of the Lord. They pray. They say, “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.” So they appeal to the Lord God. They appeal to his sovereignty. They recognize the fact, that things come to pass as he wills, and nevertheless, they pray. They didn’t say, “Now let’s rethink our stand, and perhaps we shouldn’t be too hasty about all of this. After all, to say ‘resurrection’ infuriates them, so why shouldn’t we preach the word of God in a different way? Why should we infuriate them? Let’s abandon the doctrine of the resurrection, and talk about something else.” That kind of thing constantly goes on in the church of Jesus Christ, unfortunately.

They didn’t say, “Let’s appoint a committee and study this thing out. They didn’t say, “Let’s appoint a presidential commission.” They sent messages to God, and in the course of the message that they sent to God by way of their prayer to him, they remind the Lord God that these people down on earth are just puppets in the sight of him. They appeal to Psalm 2 and they say, “Look, the Psalmist wrote a long time ago, ‘Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things. The kings of the earth stand, and the rulers are gathered together against the Lord and his Christ,’ and Lord, these people have ranged themselves against you, and they have been gathered together, and they have done precisely what you have determined should be done in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. Now, Lord, behold their threatenings and grant to us that we may speak the word of God with all boldness, and further, Lord, if it should please thee, stretch forth thy hands, and let mighty signs be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

So they appeal to the God who is able to control all of the affairs of men, and if they are faithful to him, they have the confidence and the assurance that he will be with them. And God has a wonderful way of answering prayer. Do you know what he did? He shook the building, and so as the people of God prayed, suddenly the place where they were began to shake. And he reminded them

by that shaking, of what he has promised that he's going to do. For in the book of Haggai and later the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews picks it up. God says that, “He is going to shake the heavens. He's going to shake the earth. He's going to shake men until he brings in his unshakable kingdom upon the earth.” And so it was God's way of saying, “Peter, John, the rest of you, you're doing exactly what I want you to do, and the God of heaven and earth is standing behind you, and I will shake, and I will shake, and I will shake until my purposes are accomplished. Everything that I have determined to come to pass, will come to pass, and you are responsible in the meantime to preach Jesus and the resurrection. And you will be given answer in fact and deed.” “They prayed. The place was shaken. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. They spake the word of God with boldness, and signs and wonders were done by them.” We read in verse 33, “Through great power, given to them as they preached the resurrection. So the ultimate allegiance is to the Lord God, and the ultimate response is the personal one. I love that statement in verse 24, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

It was said of John Knox, the great Scot, “He feared God so much, that he never feared the face of any man.” David Reid, a modern preacher, pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church some years ago, was called to address the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian Church; the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, it was known at that time. And when he preached, he reminded them that we are living in the days in which the truth of God is not being preached. He said, “Do you know what we need today? We need,” this, mind you, a man associated with a denomination that you do not think as being in the forefront of the preaching of the word of God now. He said, “What we need in our day, is theological guts.” That is what we need still; to preach the word of God as it has been given to us in Holy Scripture. And when that preaching is accompanied by an unforgettable personal experience of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ then, of course, we have that which will be effective in the hands of God.

I love that statement that Paul makes to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 1, when he says, verse 12, “He said he was not ashamed, but nevertheless, though he was not ashamed, he had

confidence in the one whom he believed.” He said, “I know whom I have believed, and I’m persuaded that he’s able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”

Many years ago, Rabbi Duncan, the Scottish Professor of Old Testament at New College was hearing a student make a resortation, and in the course of it the student said that, “The Apostle Paul had said, ‘I know in whom I have believed, and I’m persuaded,’” and Rabbi Duncan interrupt him and said, “Repeat that text again.” And he said, “I know in whom I have believed,” and Professor Duncan said, “Wait a minute. The text is not ‘I know in whom I have believed’ but ‘I know whom I have believed’. We must not allow any word, even a preposition, to come between us and our Savior.”

And Professor Alexander of Princeton Theological Seminary, when he was on his deathbed made the same comment, strikingly. The Scriptures were being read to him, and someone read that text, “I know in whom I have believed.” He stopped. He raised up off of his bed and he died on that bed. He said, “It’s not ‘I know in whom’ but it’s, ‘I know whom.’” We must not even let that little word “in” stand between us and our Lord. The personal experience of our Lord, as he is revealed in Scripture is the source of confidence and the source of fruitfulness. If God in his spirit, should give us the strength to proclaim him boldly, you have an opportunity to emulate the apostles in your daily experience with others. May God give you grace to avoid being a spiritual coward, and may God give you grace to boldly, and clearly, and faithfully in the Spirit, preach Christ at his resurrection. If you’re here today, and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you to come to him, and receive forgiveness of sins.

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the one, who by Thy grace and power, has been raised from the dead. And we thank Thee, Lord, that assurance has been given, that there is an ultimate judgment to be performed by the Lord Jesus, and the resurrection is the evidence of it. And we ask, Lord, if there are some here who have never believed, in marvelous grace touch their hearts,

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show them their need and lost condition, cause them by their grace to flee to Christ who died for sinners, and may O God, they so be enlightened, as to rest in him in what he has done for time and eternity. And as we leave, Lord, help us to be faithful to the message that has come to us [End of Tape]...