

How to Handle Persecution

by Danny Bond

As Christians, we must be prepared to suffer persecution for our faith and stand firm in our commitment to the full, true, biblical gospel.

Duration: 45:52

Scripture: Luke 14:14-22, Luke 15:2, Acts 4:14-18, Acts 4:37

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Acts 4:14-22 and discusses how the early church faced persecution for their faith. He emphasizes the importance of not watering down the gospel to make the church popular, as the church was never meant to be popular. The preacher highlights the example of Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaimed the truth, even in the face of opposition from religious leaders. He encourages believers to be compliant, filled with the Spirit, and aggressive in seizing opportunities to share the gospel, just like the early church did.

Transcript

Today we're going to go to the book of Acts, to chapter 4. It is a joy studying the book of Acts. I love it. So let's pray, shall we? Father, we ask that we would, each one of us, see what you would have us to see today and hear what you would have us to hear.

Lord, as we behold Peter and John, and they're so much like you, so much like you, Lord, that others took notice they had been with you. We pray that this would be true of us, that we would become so much like you, Lord Jesus, because we spend so much time with you. Lord, reveal yourself to us.

Walk with us through these verses, and walk with us through our life in a fresh way, we pray. For we ask it, Lord God, in Jesus' name, Amen. Today there's a great effort among Christian churches, in Christian churches around the world, to make the church popular.

A lot of time and energy and money goes into entertainment and such things, and watering down the gospel to make the church popular. But in my Bible, the church is never popular. Luke took a great deal of time and effort in this passage, and through verse 37 at the end of the chapter, to show us that the early church was not popular, rather they were persecuted, because they were so much like Jesus.

They are very unpopular. Now, what that says to me is, as I watch the church trying to be popular today, it says that is unbiblical. But rather, we are to be like Christ.

They took notice of these men, they had been with Christ. Verse 1, as they spoke to the people, Peter and John, going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, had stopped and healed the lame man. The man had been there for 40 years, every day, everybody knew this man, everybody knew all about him, born the way that he was, and they healed him.

You would think everybody would rejoice, but they don't. Persecution breaks out around this wonderful act of healing and the preaching that results. And so in chapter 4, verse 1, as they spoke to the people, so Peter and John are both ministering to the people after Peter's sermon, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

And they laid hands on them, they put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed in the number of the men came to be about 5,000, so 2,000 more after Pentecost. And it came to pass on the next day that the rulers and the elders and the scribes, as well as Annas, the high priest, former high priest, like Mr. President when he's the former president, they would still call you high priest.

Annas, the high priest Caiaphas, current John, Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in their midst, they formed a big semicircle around these two men, and they said, by what power or what name have you done this? Then Peter, and everything hinges on this, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers of the people, elders of Israel, if this day we are judged for a good deed done to the helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man stands here before you whole. And so he addresses the Supreme Court of his day as the 71 are before him.

And he does it boldly, and in verse 11 he quotes Psalm 118, verse 22, and he opens up the scripture to them, their scriptures. And he says, this Christ, risen from the dead, this is the stone which was rejected by you, builders, which has become chief cornerstone of the building anyway. And in verse 12, nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled when they realized they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go outside of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? For indeed, that a notable miracle has been done to them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it, but so that it spreads no further among the people.

Let us severely threaten them that from now on they speak no more of this man in this name. And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.

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 no way of punishing them. Why? Because of the people, not because they were just, but because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

For the man was over 40 years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. What a tremendous passage. Two things I want you to see here in this passage is that this is the first persecution that ever hit the early church.

This is the very first wave of persecution. So we have this persecution manifested to these men, and it comes from the religious sector. So the persecution is manifested by these religious men, and it's met by these men with a relationship with Christ, and they're filled with His Spirit.

Let's look at the manifestation of this persecution. It came to begin with, as it always comes, when they were preaching the word of God. First one, as they spoke to the people, the word of God.

The priest, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them. The full, true, biblical gospel will always bring persecution. Jesus, when He was training His disciples for this, talked about it.

Can you hold your place here and turn to John? Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 18. I love the fact that Jesus doesn't beat around the bush. He's straight to the point.

He's clear, because that's the way we all need it. In John 15, 18, Jesus is training His disciples for when He's gone. When they will be the ones preaching.

He says, if the world hates you, that satanic system, if the world hates you, you know it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. It doesn't persecute people that don't know Christ.

The world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Why? Because now you're becoming like me.

And in verse 20, He says, remember. Now, what is that? Remember is a training word. Remember, you're in training.

Remember this. Remember the word I said to you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

If they have kept my word, they will keep yours also. So, as you go and you share the word, preach the word, whatever, there will be those that will embrace it. They will say to you, you know something? I've never heard it like this.

People have talked to me about God, but never like this. I like talking to you. Tell me more.

I like this. I feel something. And you say, yes, you're feeling Jesus Christ.

There will be those that will embrace your word and they will become Christians. And there will be those that will reject your word and they will reject you because they reject Him and they will persecute you. Jesus said, don't think that I came to bring peace to everybody.

I came to bring a sword, the truth, the divides. You will find yourself in your house divided from those that reject Christ and those that love Christ. There will be alienation in relationships because of me.

And that is definitely true. The light of Christ divides from darkness and light and those who love darkness and those who love light. In John 16, can you look over there in verse 2? Jesus is preparing them for exactly what He's going to go through and what all the apostles eventually went through, death, for the name of Christ and their persecution.

In John 16, 2, He said, they will put you out of the synagogues. They will put you out of the synagogues just the time is coming that whoever, what, you're in training. Let me tell you while we're still training, you will be killed.

That doesn't mean your heart is filled with the grace and the power and the courage right now, but it would be then. And you would gladly die for Him if you know Him. And He's telling them, you will, you will, and they did.

So He prepares them, He trains them. Persecution's coming. So they weren't surprised when this happened on that day.

And in 2 Timothy 3.12, Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ will suffer persecution. Notice He doesn't say all who live a perfect Christian life and preach perfectly will suffer persecution. He does not say that.

He says all who desire to live godly in Christ. Because you know what, brethren, that's the best we can do. We do our best and we commit the rest, right? So it's always the direction of our hearts, not the perfection.

I'm so thankful for that. So God has been satisfied having found the perfection in His Son. He's fully satisfied with that perfection.

He's only looking for direction in my life now. Desire, and then He meets that desire and then He rushes in to my life to meet that desire and as a result I know Him and my life changes and God is in my life in Christ. So all who desire to live godly in Christ, as a result, will have wonderful fellowship with Christ and their hearts will be filled with His Word.

They will read His Word and they will then speak His Word and as a result they will suffer persecution. So brethren, all of us that love Him will. Does that scare you? Well, if you're human, I suppose it does.

And how many of us are? All of us. There's a part of us that are afraid of that. But not everybody dies of persecution.

In America, you know, we don't hear of that a lot, do we? No. What we have in America is the death of your ego. Which may be worse, huh? Oh, I died for Christ.

Well, then why don't you live for Him now? The death of the ego is a big thing to us. Your image, you want people to think you're cool. How many here don't want people to think you're cool? All right.

She's got it. I wanted you to think I was cool today. I wear this little knit black shirt.

I left the white part out right here because I wanted you to think I was cool. But you see, in Christ, we've got to let that go. We've got to check it at the door, really.

Because Jesus Himself is not cool with the darkness. He convicts them. And the other thing is, is that once you understand that persecution validates genuine Christianity, then you're encouraged by it.

Not that it feels good, but you are encouraged by it that you're the real thing. The full, true, biblical gospel always brings persecution, and persecution validates genuine Christianity. John Flavel, that great writer of old, once said, Who is more innocent than Christ, and who is more persecuted? And the world, he said, is the world still.

It hasn't changed. It will persecute you. Galatians 6.17, Paul said, From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body, head to toe, the marks, the scars that have come because of Jesus Christ.

William Hendrickson put it well when he said, Scars are the price which every believer pays for his loyalty to Jesus Christ. Amy Carmichael penned a poem, Hast thou no scar? Thou hast not traveled far, if thou hast no scar. Peter and John, right up front, get some scars here, but it doesn't stop them.

Came as they were preaching the word of God, this persecution, it came from the religious community. Same people who had executed Jesus Christ. We read that as they spoke, back in Acts 4.1, as they spoke to the people, the priest, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them.

Now, who are these people? We read about them in the Bible. You can go for years and not know who the priests are. You can go for years and not know who the Sadducees are.

And in a few minutes, we'll see the scribes, and a few more verses, and you can go and not know who they are. Well, to begin with here, they did this miracle, and all these people showed up. The priests showed up.

Who are they? They would be the priests on duty at that time. There were 24 groups of them. They would be chosen by lot, so that in teams, they would come and they would do the morning and evening sacrifice of the Lamb.

In the morning, throughout Jerusalem, you would smell barbecued Lamb. Smells good right now. In the evening, you would smell barbecued Lamb.

They would offer up the morning and evening sacrifice. So you would eagerly anticipate that season when you get to do that. You get to serve as the priest.

All right, these guys have been waiting. It's now their time. Peter and John show up and blow the whole thing.

They're about to get to do their routine, and Peter and John create this huge commotion. It's evening time. They put them in prison because it's evening.

So it blows their whole gig for their evening. So they're mad. So they show up.

And then there's the captain of the temple. Who is that? It's the temple police. You see, the Romans gave the Jews the right to have police at their own temple.

They had clubs. They weren't given the right of capital punishment, so they don't have swords, but they had clubs. And so, because they healed this man in the name of Jesus, they call the police.

Does that tell you where these guys are at? That's religion for you. They call the police. So the priests show up because they're mad.

They've interfered with their evening gig. The police are called in, and the captain comes, and then the Sadducees come. These guys are critical in the New Testament.

They are the dominant political power of the day. They are the elite upper class, of which there are very few among the Jews. They are the wealthy landowners.

They are the compromisers with Rome, lands and title. And they are very careful to make sure there's no overt activity against Rome, because they want to keep their land and their wealth that they gained by compromise with Rome. The Sadducees.

What is shocking to me is that during this time, when you read the name Annas, Caiaphas, and so on, what is shocking to me is that during this time, during the time of Christ, in this time here, the high priests of those days were Sadducees. It's just shocking to me. Annas, Caiaphas, and the descendants of Annas, because they rotated them in and out as it pleased Rome.

See, Annas was in league with Rome. He was an operator, a mafia type. And he got a lot of money by interacting with Rome and compromising his whole nation with Rome.

And so they rotated in and out his relatives. By the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament, if you're a high priest, you're a high priest for your entire what? Life. These guys are Sadducees.

And on top of being extremely materialistic, political compromisers, on top of all that, they do not believe in the supernatural at all. Now think of this. These are the high priests.

They do not believe in the supernatural at all. When you read Sadducee in your Bible, know this. They don't believe in angels.

They don't believe in Satan. They don't believe in demons. They don't believe in any life after death.

And they don't believe in miracles. They don't believe in anything supernatural whatsoever. Can you imagine the high priest of the entire nation of Israel? They don't believe, who doesn't believe in life after death, doesn't believe in angels, who are involved in the giving of the law with Moses, doesn't believe anything supernatural.

These are the Sadducees. And now you see why they were sad, you see. What a hopeless existence.

So along come Peter and John. And they're preaching resurrection. They don't believe in resurrection.

If resurrection is true, they're heretics. And they're in big trouble. Especially because all the people are glorifying God.

That God has healed this lame man. And He's done it through the name of Jesus Christ. Anointed.

Jesus the Messiah from Nazareth. Oh my, they are in huge trouble. They're in huge trouble.

They teach the people there's no resurrection. Along come Peter and John. And this man is healed.

He's resurrected from his paralyzed state. He is healed by the resurrected Christ they preach. And they killed that Christ.

And they're saying He's alive. And there's living proof that He is. And they cannot deny it.

They are in big trouble. So they are, verse 2, greatly disturbed. Now you know why.

And they're especially offended by the resurrection from the dead. It's not just resurrection of the dead. See, the Bible speaks all over of resurrection of the dead.

You, today, have eternal life. A believer in Christ, not a believer in Christ. You still have eternal life.

The Bible speaks of the resurrection of the dead all over the place. The dead will rise. Small and great, Revelation tells us.

And they will stand before the white throne of Christ to be judged. John says, I saw the dead small and great. So, everybody's going to rise again.

The question is, what awaits you after that? Heaven or hell? You say, well, I believe there's many paths to God. Well, you may believe that, but it's not true. There are only two religious paths in life.

There is the broad road that leads to destruction. And there's the narrow road that leads to eternal life. There are only two paths.

You are on one or the other today. These Sadducees, these scribes, these Pharisees, these temple police, were on the broad road of religion of human achievement to try to get to heaven. And nobody's getting to heaven that way.

That will lead you straight to eternity without God. The broad road that leads to destruction is the road of religion of human achievement. Works that you do, church involvement.

The only other road is Christ. And that is the religion of divine accomplishment on your behalf. The finished work of Jesus, which leads to a relationship with Him.

Only two paths. These men are on the broad road that leads to destruction. And they are thus offended, not only by resurrection of Christ, but He was resurrected out from the dead ones.

These are the original deadheads, the Sadducees. And they're ungrateful. They are the original ungrateful deadheads.

And what Peter and John are saying to them is exactly that. And they're saying that Christ arose out from the dead. You are the dead ones.

You killed Him. You're dead spiritually, so you failed to recognize your own Messiah. You're so dead, you killed the Prince of Life.

And He rose again out from among the dead ones. And He went back to heaven. You are spiritually dead.

You will die spiritually dead. You will raise again spiritually dead. You will be judged by Him and live forever spiritually dead, which means outside of the presence of God forever.

So, in Christ, you are raised out from among the dead ones. Jesus said to the church of Smyrna, you will never see the second death. So, you die in this body, then you stand before Christ, and then you're sentenced to eternal death outside of God, where you live forever dead to the things of God.

Out from the dead ones. It's an indictment to them. It's a speech of the resurrection.

It is a two-fold indictment on them. And so, they are greatly agitated. So, they persecute these men.

As they preach the word of God, it comes from the religious sector, and it comes upon them suddenly. And they throw them in jail. Verse 3. And they laid hands on them, not to pray.

They laid hands on them, and they put them in custody, the anti-visas, in jail. Until the next day, because it was already evening. You know what's amazing about these guys? What's already evening got to do with it? It was against their law to call together the 71 members of the Sanhedrin, the priests and the scribes, etc., etc.

It was against their law to call together the Sanhedrin, the 71 ruling elders of Israel, the Supreme Court of Israel, and have a trial after dark. They're so concerned about doing things right. Let's throw them in jail until tomorrow.

Because they heal the lame man. You know something? These are the same guys that didn't mind breaking their own law and took Jesus in the middle of the night and tried Him illegal according to their own law. See, religionists, they say and they do not.

They're just hypocrites. And they work and operate as it suits them because they don't know God. And so they don't understand the things of God and they make it up as they go along most of the time and that becomes what we call tradition.

And Jesus said, You pay more attention to and teach more the traditions of men than you do the truth of God. That's how He handled these men. They threw them in jail.

But you know something amazing? That even though they threw them in jail for the evening, they bound them. It only caused the message of the gospel to stand out. It only drew more focus to what they were preaching.

Why are these guys in jail? They were preaching Jesus that He died for our sins and rose again the third day. And that because He's alive, He's healed this lame man that we all know for 40 years. Really? Yeah.

So then He did rise from the dead? Yeah. So then He is the Messiah from Nazareth? Yeah. Oh, then I believe on Him.

And so 2,000 believed. You see, they tried to bind the messengers to bind the message, but the message, the Word of God, is not bound. Say, for example, John Bunyan, who wrote Pilgrim's Progress.

Did he write that in a cabin in the mountains by a stream contemplating the bubbling brook, the chirp of the birds, the blue sky? No, he was in a wretched prison. And there they thought they could bind him and thereby bind his message. What they did instead is they released Pilgrim's Progress on the whole world.

How about that? You can't bind the message. Pilgrim's Progress exists as one of the most well-read books in the history of the human race. And it's all about Jesus and it's all Bible.

And it came from the jail in which John Bunyan was bound. God gave him that book in that jail. He wrote it there.

These men are bound and their message goes out and many believe, 2,000. So the persecution comes. This is where it begins.

It goes on to this day. Now, how do they meet it? Let me give you four things. Very practical.

It's here and these are examples that we follow. I don't need to go to some seminar on this. I don't need to follow the current trend in the church.

In fact, to me, if it's new, it's bad. Simple rule. If it's new, stay away from it.

If it's old and it's biblical, then you have your Bible anyway. You got it right here. Four things on how to meet persecution.

To begin with, be compliant. Don't fight it. See, the first thing we do when persecution hits is we say, Oh God, deliver me from this.

Stop it now, Lord. We try all the little magic scooby-dos we know. I bind you, Satan, in the name of Jesus.

I order you, get your hands off God's property. I'm so scared. Just tell me how long to be bound and I'll go stay in the corner until you let me out.

Oh, well, as long as you're at it. Why don't you bind him for all of us, Mr. Powerhouse? Doesn't work. Jesus combines Satan if he wants, and he doesn't always.

So you see, when persecution hits, he has allowed it. Flow with it to where it takes you. It's going to take you to an arena in which you can share the gospel.

It's going to take you to a platform upon which God will manifest His glory. It's going to take you to a place in your life where you're going to be manifest in your weakness, and His strength is going to be manifest on that platform of your life. In that, they are compliant.

They don't fight. They go along with it. And as a result, they get to preach to the entire Sanhedrin.

Think of that. The full gospel. Verse 5. It came to pass on the next day that their rulers and elders and scribes... Look at this entourage.

As well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas the high priest, John, Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest. They all gathered together at Jerusalem. This huge thing.

What's happened? A layman's been healed. It's terrible. These two guys are on the loose.

They're talking about Jesus, and a layman's been healed. Get the Supreme Court in here quick. What is that? But they are compliant.

They go along with it. Why? Because they can't wait to preach to these guys. And preach they do.

And in verse 7, when they had set them in their midst, they asked, By what power and what name have you done this? Oh, you want the answer? And Peter, verse 8, filled with the Holy Spirit. That's the secret.

That is the secret to standing against all persecution.

You cannot stand in your own strength. Walk with God day by day. Read your Bible.

Pray. Yield to the Lord. That's how you live a Spirit-filled life.

Jesus said, If you love me, you will obey my commandments, and I will manifest myself to you in the Father's presence also. So that's how Peter ended up filled with the Spirit here. Walking with the Lord.

He stood up, filled with the Spirit. And that's the secret to handling all persecution. So his mind was governed by the mind of God.

His heart was governed by the love and the power of God. And so out of his power-filled heart comes this powerful message. And so, how do you handle persecution? First of all, be compliant.

God's taking you somewhere where you can share the gospel in a way that you wouldn't imagine. Secondly, make sure you're Spirit-filled or you'll never stand against it. Third, be aggressive to seize the opportunities when they come.

Because they will. Verses 8 through 13. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Watch this.

Watch how this guy doesn't water down the gospel. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, He's just a fisherman. John, a sidekick.

Just a fisherman. These guys are dressed in robes. They've been to the seminaries, the rabbinical seminaries.

They're all trained. They're all pros. And they are the rulers of the nation.

Here are two rag-tag fishermen. He stands up, filled with the Holy Spirit. He's got the supernatural eloquence and presence.

And they said, Tell us! Oh, you want to hear? He says, All right. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, Rulers of the people! Elders of Israel! If we this day are judged for the good deed done to a helpless man, Hello? What is wrong with you? He turned the whole thing around immediately. Who's on trial now? You would judge us for healing a helpless man? And you're men of God? But if you want to know by what means he's been made well, let it be known to you all and all of the people here from Israel, here's why he's healed.

That by the name of Jesus, let's be really clear, you 71 rulers that rejected Christ because you couldn't bear the thought of a Messiah who would die. You wanted a Messiah who would be your military ruler who would free you from the Roman yoke. And when he died, you could not believe that your Messiah could die.

Therefore, he couldn't be the Messiah. No military leader to free the nation would just go off and die. Well, if that's your barrier, if that's held you back, know this.

That by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. If you were all hung up on the fact that he went off and died, know this. He's alive.

You killed his body. That's all you could kill. See, Jesus didn't die.

Not Christ. His spirit stayed alive. His body died.

His body was raised from the dead. And he's alive today. And Peter's saying he's alive right now.

You know how we always went around healing people? He's here and that's why this guy's healed. Because he's here. He's been healed in the name of Christ.

Just as Christ always did so he has done because he's alive. I got news for you. And you already knew it.

The Roman guards told you as eyewitnesses. You already knew it. You have rejected the truth of his resurrection.

Now are you going to reject the proof of his resurrection? You've known this guy sitting here for 40 years. And you know Christ has done this. Because this has Christ all over it.

Whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. By him this man stands here before you whole. Now this fisherman in the face of these great erudite scholars with their pomp and everything else.

He rightly divides their scripture in a way that only one other man has ever done. And who was that? Jesus. He opened up the Old Testament and he elaborated.

And when he was done people were astonished. They marveled. Peter reaches back to Psalm 118 verse 22 and he pulls it right out in front of them.

They all know it. And he says, you want to know the fulfillment of Psalm 118? It's you guys. The stone that was rejected by you builders.

Verse 11. That was Christ, the Messiah. You rejected him.

You thought you killed him. He rose from the dead. He's alive.

You thought you got rid of that stone. He is the cornerstone of everything now. He lives.

He's king. He's Lord. He's back.

And what are you going to do about it? And what is so tremendous is what they do right here. They call these 71 men to salvation. Whatever your barriers were about the Messiah who died, he's alive.

That barrier is gone. Now you come to Christ. In verse 12 they say it.

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. They're calling them to Christ right there. You see, study these guys.

You will never find them denying the resurrection. They know it's true. They don't try to deny it.

They know it's true. And so they call them to Christ here. They don't come.

But they are given the invitation to come right here. Now, do you believe Christ died and rose again for your sins? If you do, and you love him, then praise the Lord. If you believe it, but you do nothing with it, and you're like these men here, then you're not going to heaven when you die.

You're not saved by your head knowledge. You're saved by believing in your heart, which you understand with your head. Believe in your heart and confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, that he died and rose again for you, and you'll be saved.

Have you done that? Do it today if you haven't. You say it's that easy? Yes. It's that easy, and it's harder than anything else in all of life if you love your sin.

But would it be smart for you to gain a world of sin and lose your own soul? That's the most foolish thing you could ever do. Do you know Christ today? If you don't, come to know him right now. Open your heart right now and receive him right now.

To as many as receive him, to them he gives the power to become the sons of God. Say, Lord, fill me with your power. Save me.

Forgive me for my sins. Rescue me from myself and this world around me and from eternity without you to come. Take me to heaven when I die.

Save me right now, Lord Jesus. I believe all of these things, and he will. Do not leave here without knowing Christ.

He's here. He's waiting. If you feel your heart burning, are you just going to sit there and stare with a glazed haze on your eyes? I believe that, but I don't think I know him.

Well, then why not? And when? And if you have no intention of giving your heart to him today, let me tell you something. You have no intention of ever giving your life to him, and don't kid yourself anymore. If you won't give your life to him today, you're not going to.

You have no plans on it. If you did, you would do it now. So do it now.

And don't play any more games with God or with your life. Your life is very, very fragile. One big bulldozer can squish you.

Steamroller. Then the cleanup committee has to come. That's how fragile you are.

And every one of us is going to die. Believe on him today. Believe on him now.

Today is the day of salvation. Don't be like these men who, with all of this, still rejected him. How do you handle persecution? You're compliant, so you can see what doors God opens.

You are spirit-filled, and then you are aggressive to seize the opportunities. When the doors do open to witness, you don't water it down. Finally, you are obedient at all costs.

Verse 14 through 22. They could not withstand this work of God, because it was from God. And verse 14.

Seeing the man who had been healed standing with them. Now you know he wasn't just standing at attention. This guy has never walked.

He's over there. He's doing jumping jacks. You know, he's just trying it all out.

He's doing a little tap dance, some soft shoe. And he's, you know, seeing him over there. I mean, this is real.

This isn't fake. And I have him propped up with some sticks. No, he's over there.

Hey, yeah. Seeing this man that was healed. They could say nothing against it.

Verse 15. But when they had commanded them to go outside of the council, they conferred among themselves, and they say, What are we going to do? This guy definitely healed. They said Christ did it.

We know this kind of stuff. Christ did. What are we going to do? That's what they say in verse 16.

They say, What shall we do with these men? For indeed, a notable miracle has been done through them. It's evident to everybody in the entire city of Jerusalem. And we can't deny it.

71 of us. We can't deny it. What do we do? Oh, they get a tremendous revelation.

Verse 17. But I got an idea. Here it is, guys.

So that this spreads no further among the people. Let's severely threaten them. OK.

That's brilliant. Wow. Do you always get revelations like that? Let's threaten them.

Yeah. We'll tell them not to speak in the name of this man anymore. That's it.

Get them back in here. What a solution. They call them back in verse 18, and they commanded them, Do not speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus.

Oh, OK. I think some of us would do something like that. Oh, whatever.

It's all right. It's cool. I'm cool.

You cool. I'm cool. We cool.

Ain't that right? We cool. I like the fact that they don't say they won't and then do. I like the fact they just say no.

The answer is no. We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard. So what do they do? They threaten them some more.

Look, you know, we're going to really... We'll think of something. We'll think... You better look out. And so verse 20, When they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them.

And don't forget it. You just better look out. Because of the people.

Since they all glorified God for what had been done. How amazing. That the early Christians had to be commanded to stop preaching the gospel.

Think of that. Had to be ordered to stop. And when ordered, Really, didn't they? They knew that these aren't idle threats.

These guys are killers. They killed Christ. They're Christ killers.

They knew these weren't idle threats. Jesus had said, They will put you out of the synagogue. And they will kill you.

Now they know right there and then. What we say now is going to determine our life. And we're going to say it.

We will speak his name. You cannot stop us. We will not stop.

You see, They couldn't stop them. Unless they killed them. Ordered to stop preaching Christ.

Today Christians have to be commanded to start. Do you preach Christ? Do people have to command you to stop? Is there persecution coming your way to stop you? If there is, Then thank God for it. It's really a good validation.

If you came to the point where you crossed the line, And you said, Lord, it stops here. The carnality, The lukewarmness, The selfishness. It's all you from here, Lord.

And suddenly persecution has begun to hit your life. In many different ways. Thank God for it.

It's proof that you are the real thing. If you don't have any of that coming your way, Then you don't share the gospel. And if you don't, You have to ask yourself, Why not? If you love the Lord and you love his word, You will.

And you will do it no matter what. And it doesn't matter what persecution comes your way, It isn't going to stop you. And you will find that that which cannot kill you will only strengthen you.

And you will know, as Tozer knew, That the fire of God can't be damped out by the waters of man's persecution. And you will know what some other man of God said, That the crushing of the church is like the smashing of an atom. I love that.

The crushing of the church is like the smashing of an atom. Divine energy of high quality is released in enormous quantity. With miraculous effects.

You see, when you take a real Christ-loving, born-again, spirit-filled Christian, And they preach the word of God, They share Christ, And you persecute that individual, It's like crushing an atom. There's explosive power released in that life. Because they press on, And Christ is their fortitude, Christ is their strength.

Now there's more strength than there was, And more power, And more of Jesus, And more life than there was before the persecution. You understand? That's the way it works in God's kingdom. That's why we don't run from it.

That's why we don't whine and cry like babies when it hits us. We say, Thank you, Lord. I don't like the pain, But I like the fact that you're going to open doors, Fill me with your spirit.

I'm going to aggressively take those opportunities, And use me, And fill me, And let my life count, In the midst of what is obviously, An attack from the enemy, For me to stop my mouth for Jesus. And that's the way you live your life. And you live it today that way, Until you die.

And when you die, You'll find that you won't die, But rather Jesus will come for you as he promised, And take you to the Father's house, Where he has a mansion waiting for you, And it's filled with treasure, Eternal reward, Which is the life of God in your soul, In great quantity, Forever, Proportion to how you served him here, And suffered for him here. For this light affliction, Paul said, Does work for me, An eternal weight of glory. The more I suffer for him, The more he's carving me out as a vessel, That will

contain more of his glory forever.

So I say, Go for it, Lord. Have thine own way, Lord, Have thine own way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay.

Do it, Lord. May your kingdom come, And may your will be done. And you pray the prayer that cannot fail.

That's the end to all prayer. Your will be done. And you watch him work in your life.

And you will have communion with him, The likes of which you never dreamed of. And you will breathe the rarefied air of heavenly places, And you will not be average, And you will not be mediocre, And you will not be monotone, You will be something totally different, Something totally unique, All different, And we all reveal a different part of God, And a different part of Christ, And thus you will stand out as somebody totally, utterly different. And everybody will know it's because of Jesus.

Because they knew you before. And the conclusion will be, He lives. I want him to live in me.

Let's pray. Lord, For any here today that don't know you, May this be the moment They turn their life over to you. And if you're in that place, And you've held off all through the message, Give your heart to Christ now.

And Lord, we pray you'd give your heart to us, And that we would find Christ in us, Working mightily, And then through us, Use us, Lord, we pray. And may nothing that comes our way stop us From speaking the glories of your name. And we will give you all the glory, For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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