

# To confidently Declare Christs Resurrection

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[ 0 : 01 ] If we could turn again together at Acts chapter 4, and this morning I would like to look from verses 1 to 22 with you. Acts chapter 4, verses 1 to 22.

And I suppose the theme of the sermon, if I was to give it one, would be to confidently declare Christ's resurrection. I don't know about you, but we're in danger of fast becoming a society which is based upon wishy-washy bland statements.

Statements which say nothing very important to us. It's as if we're not that sure of ourselves. We say a statement and we then throw in lots of caveats, lots of loopholes, lots of clauses.

It's as if we don't want to be committed to a statement. You see this in the public life, the politicians are always trying to squirm out of things they've previously said. You see it in the life of celebrity and in the media.

Nobody seems to be certain. Nobody seems to want to say anything for definite. And I suppose what we see at a societal level, we can also experience ourselves.

[ 1 : 11 ] Because as Christians, we can succumb to the kind of pressure not to say anything definite. To kind of water down a message.

To kind of cut out the things which maybe go against what the world would have us say or think. And so the pressure for the Christian to change the gospel, to rework it, to make it more palatable, is increasingly strong.

But this is not a new problem. The problem to cut the things out of the gospel which are hard is not new. In fact, it's centuries old. It's millennia old.

And what we read in Acts chapter 4 is an account of a time when the Christian church in its infancy was pressurized by the authorities to cut the thing about Jesus and his resurrection out.

Just stop telling us that story. And so what we're going to do this morning is we're going to look at this passage and to see if we can learn any of the example from Peter and John as to how we can cope in a world which seeks to put pressure on us.

[ 2 : 20 ] To change the gospel. To dilute the gospel. To even be quiet about the gospel. And so I'd like to look at three things with you this morning from this passage. First of all, in verses 1 to 4, we learn that the resurrection divides opinion.

The second thing we're going to see is that God gives us confidence to proclaim his message in verses 5 to 12. And then finally, God's will must be our priority as we see in verses 13 to 22.

First of all, the resurrection divides opinion. We have that in verses 1 to 4. In verse 1, we have the beginning of the opposition to the Christian message.

It's as if you can hear kind of Chopin's funeral marches. You see these sinister figures snaking their way to the front of the crowd to where Peter and John are proclaiming the resurrection of Christ.

The group of men that are before Peter and John are a fearful bunch. They're the Sanhedrin.

They're the most powerful men in Jerusalem at that time.

[ 3 : 28 ] And they are coming with the intent of stamping out the gospel message. This group consists of, as we have in verse 1, the priest, the captain of the guard, and the Sadducees.

Each one with their own particular reason for stamping out the resurrection message. First of all, we have the priests. The religious leaders in Jerusalem.

The ones who had been the major accusers of Jesus as he went about his earthly business. The ones who had concocted the schemes and the plans to get Jesus crucified.

The priests can no longer put up with Peter and John's claims about a risen Lord Jesus. They want this message shut up. And so what they do is they send their henchmen to Peter and John.

Following close behind the priests is the captain of the guard. This guy is a major player in the life of Jerusalem. He is an equivalent. He is in par with the chief priest at that time.

[ 4 : 30 ] He would have belonged to one of the priestly families. And it was his job to police the temple. He would hand select men to guard the temple and to ensure that the temple was well policed.

The priest and the captain of the temple of the guard couldn't cope with a message that said salvation can only be found through Christ Jesus and nobody else.

They couldn't cope with a message that said actually all that you're doing, all the rules that you're fulfilling won't get you to God. What they want is the people to slavishly follow the rules that they have concocted.

They don't want the people to chase after the message of Jesus Christ and his resurrection. The final group that are before them are the Sadducees. This group has been gaining power in Jerusalem at this time.

They have become the religion of the wealthy elite in Jerusalem. They had three distinctive principles. They denied the resurrection of the dead. They denied any divine involvement in the world.

[ 5 : 39 ] And they argued that you could live as you wanted. That God was not really concerned with how you lived your life. So these three groups of men are all against the gospel message.

The message that Jesus is risen. These men couldn't accept this message because of pride. Pride prevented these men from accepting the message of a risen Jesus.

It was this pride that prevented them from bowing the knee to King Jesus. It was this pride that had fooled them into thinking that they didn't need Jesus. That they don't need a Lord and a Savior. And it is this pride that stops us so often from accepting Jesus and his salvation.

We live in a world which strangely mixes the teaching of the Sadducees and the Pharisees together. Most people will say, yes, I believe in God.

Most people think, however, that God's not really involved in my life. If he was, he would get rid of evil. He would get rid of suffering. And he would make my life tolerable.

[ 6 : 43 ] He would make it happy all the time. Most people would say that they believe in a God. But, yeah, I want to do my thing. I want to be in charge of the way I live.

I don't want God to tell me what I should do. I can figure it out very well. Thank you very much. And they also kind of find themselves saying, like the Pharisees, well, yeah, there's a heaven.

Yes, there's a God. But I can gain access to heaven and to God by my own way. I can do it myself.

As long as I do enough good. As long as I give to charity. As long as I do kind things to the poor.

As long as I don't hurt anybody. I'll be fine. I'll get to heaven on my own merit. What's the difference? What's the difference between the thought world of Peter and John and the thought world of Herondi?

Not much, I would argue. As we seek to proclaim the truth of Christ's resurrection today in this place. We too will face opposition. We too will come against trouble and conflict as we tell the world of our risen Lord Jesus.

[ 7 : 49 ] And as we say that authority lies with him and in him alone. We may not face a magistrate. We may not be taken to court for what we believe.

But we face the ridicule of the media. The colleague. The friend. Maybe even the family member. The scorn and the mockery that we face. May subtly sap our confidence in the message that we proclaim.

May subtly take away the edge. The passion to let others know about the risen Lord Jesus. And it gets to the point where we begin to think that nobody on earth is going to believe our message anymore.

We begin to doubt the power of God to bring about the act of conversion. We begin to doubt that God can actually work in our day. It can be tempting to give up.

So few come to Christ. So few are interested in the truth about the resurrection of the risen Lord Jesus. However, look at verse 4. There it says, But many of those who had heard the word believed.

[ 8 : 53 ] And the number of the men came to about 5,000. Though Satan and all his foot soldiers came up and sought to oppose the gospel truth. The gospel truth went out.

The gospel truth did its work. Conversions were happening. The church was growing. In two sermons, 5,000 men were converted. That is truly astounding.

What we must learn from this is God's will will not be chained as we have in 2 Timothy 2.9. There is nothing that government can do.

There is nothing that societies can do. There is nothing that man can do to stop the word of God from going out and from bringing about new life. They cannot defeat it. They cannot destroy it. That should fill us with confidence. That should fill us with hope that the God we rely on, the God who is our God and our saviour, is doing his work and will do it through us. Yes, we will face opposition.

[ 9 : 48 ] But yes, men and women, boys and girls, will come to know the Lord Jesus. We don't witness mass conversions here in our own country in these days. But that's not to mean God is not at work.

The church is growing at a phenomenal rate throughout the world. I was reading in the Guardian, in the Guardian, the most liberal paper we have, and it was talking about the rise of Calvinism in China.

And the article declared that the church was growing at about 500,000 per year. And he said, that's a conservative estimate. House churches are alive with young, well-educated people who are vigorously proclaiming the resurrection.

The article quoted a Dr. Tan, who was a Singaporean expert in the Christian church in China. And she said, very soon, Christians will become the majority of university students.

That could happen. The biggest nation on earth is going through a huge revival where young men and women are coming to know Christ. That is encouraging.

[ 10 : 57 ] That is good news. We may not see it here in our country, but it's happening. God is working. God is pushing forward. Satan and his army cannot oppose the gospel from going out.

What we must remember is that if we are faithful in our witness to God, he will be faithful to us. Yes, we face times of small amounts of conversion.

Yes, we may struggle as the church leaks members and leaks adherents. But if we remain faithful, God will remain faithful to us. So the first thing that we can take from this passage is that, yes, the resurrection divides opinion.

Some will accept, but some will reject. Second, from verses 5 to 12, God gives us the confidence to proclaim his message.

Remember Peter in Matthew 26, 70. Having been confronted by a servant girl, he runs away scared. He cannot even speak of Jesus and the fact that he is a follower of Jesus to a little servant girl.

[ 12 : 07 ] However, look at him now. This fisherman is before the highest court in Jerusalem and he is proclaiming the gospel truth of Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

What has happened? What is going on here? And so what we find out in verses 5 to 12 is the spirit is at work in Peter's life. Verse 6 is like one of those moments where the camera zooms in on all the celebrities at Wimbledon or these other shows.

And what we see in the crowd are Annas, Caiaphas, John and Alexander to name but a few. How are Peter and John going to cope in front of these very eminent people?

How are they going to cope with the brightest religious and legal minds in Jerusalem at that day?

And the one question that the Sanhedrin demand to know the answer to is this.

By what power or by what name did you do this? Peter seizes this opportunity to tell the gospel. He seizes upon this opportunity to give them a powerful sermon on the person of Jesus Christ.

[ 13 : 21 ] Peter starts off his sermon by mocking the whole situation. And he's basically saying, I am before this court because I've committed a good deed. I've done a good thing. A man has been healed through me.

Is that why I'm here? Is that why you want me here? Is that why I'm up before you? Then after Peter makes a mockery of the whole situation, he begins by stating that the power that raised Jesus from the grave is the same power that gave this man the ability to stand.

It's the same power that gave this man the ability to run and to stand and to walk. Peter is taking the facts of Jesus' resurrection right to the people who stubbornly refused to believe he was the Messiah.

The one who could reunite God and humanity. However, not only does a proof of a miracle stand before them, but Peter then builds up his case.

He builds and builds and builds. And what he begins to do, he begins to argue scripture with the religious leaders. He quotes Psalm 118. And he says that Jesus is the cornerstone.

[ 14 : 31 ] He is the one that you have rejected. He was the cornerstone of the religious system. He was the one on whom the religious system pointed. He would be the one that would bring about all that God had promised in the Old Testament.

But you didn't see it. You didn't recognize him as the Messiah. But yet, he was the one sent by God to save you. Peter is declaring that the healing of the cripple points to the spiritual healing that Christ brings.

He turns to the assembled crowd before him. And declares to the assembled gathering and to us today that spiritual healing is possible through Christ and his resurrection.

Spiritual healing can only be found in Jesus Christ and his death and his resurrection. What has happened to Peter? How is this fisherman able to stand so boldly and so confidently before the Sanhedrin declaring the truth of the gospel?

How is he able to do it? Verse 8 says it all. Filled with the Holy Spirit. That's how. The Holy Spirit of God is within him.

[ 15 : 52 ] He is enabling him to speak. He is enabling him to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whenever we hear about the Holy Spirit in Acts, it is always associated with the proclamation of the gospel.

Previously, Peter and John had been given the ability to preach in most extraordinary ways. They were able to preach in languages that they did not understand.

And through their preaching, thousands upon thousands were coming to know the risen Lord Jesus. This same Holy Spirit is promised to all believers.

This Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ said in Acts chapter 1 verse 8, will be a helper to all of us who hold the name of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will enable us as Christians to thrive in this world.

It's a Holy Spirit that will enable us to speak for Christ in a world that is hostile to him. The New Testament age, that age between Christ going to heaven and his return to earth in judgment, would be characterized by God reigning throughout the world, as prophesied in Joel 2 verses 28 to 32.

[ 17 : 10 ] And for this to be achieved, the Holy Spirit would dwell within each believer, guiding and directing them so as to ensure that God's glory would be fully earthed, and that through the preaching of the word, disciples would come to know the Lord Jesus from every nation on earth.

This must be a huge encouragement for us today, that no matter where we are, as believers, God's Spirit goes with us. Whether we are going into the streets of Stornwood, the slums of Calcutta, God's Spirit is with us.

God's Spirit is working within us, helping us to proclaim the message of the risen Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is with us in any and every situation we find ourselves in.

And the Holy Spirit will enable us to be witnesses to the risen Lord Jesus, so that God will be glorified on earth. For Peter and John, this meant before a court, for us, it might be in the workplace tomorrow.

For us, it might be with coffee with a friend. For us, it might be in the family home. The Holy Spirit will enable us to profess the name of Christ in an appropriate way, in a way that is appealing and is winsome to those who hear.

[ 18 : 26 ] Do not ever doubt the fact that God will leave you. He will always be there with you. He will enable you to speak. He will give you the words which you need to proclaim his risen Lord Jesus.

Remember, we confidently declare Christ's uniqueness, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Holy Spirit. As those who have been filled with the Spirit, let us then declare the glory of the risen Lord Jesus.

And finally, God's will must be our priority. Verses 13 to 22. As we continue to focus in on the courtroom, the focus swings away from Peter and John, and now the light is shining upon those who are gathered, onto the Sanhedrin itself.

They are perplexed. What are they going to do with these men? These two fishermen from the back of beyond. What's going to happen next? It is incredible that what we have in verses 13 to 17 are a group of men who are fairly impressed by these two country bumpkins that stand before them.

It doesn't compute. Fishermen don't make great religious leaders. Why? They haven't even been to rabbi school. But yet they speak with confidence.

[ 19 : 55 ] They speak with such conviction. Impressed as they are with the abilities of Peter and John. They are, however, still unimpressed with the message that they bring.

The Sanhedrin still stubbornly refuses to accept that Jesus is the Messiah. They will not entertain such a thought. Jesus is the Savior?

Never. He was a nobody from a nothing town. It was true that no good thing came out from Bethlehem. In verse 13, it is obvious that these two men before them had had a personal experience of Jesus.

Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. These men have clearly been transformed by the Lord Jesus.

It is evident in the way they speak and it's evident in the way they teach what he taught. As Christians, we must stand out as those who have a personal encounter with the risen Lord Jesus.

[ 21 : 00 ] We must stand out to those in the world who do not yet know Jesus that we have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus. Are we faithfully representing our Lord and Savior?

Are we the fragrance of Christ as Paul urges us to be in 2 Corinthians? Are we following our Lord's commands to be lights in the dark and salt and the salt of the earth?

How are we displaying in our day-to-day lives that we have met with the risen Lord Jesus? Are we representing him accurately as the one who offers salvation to all?

Or have we misrepresented his message by the way we act and by the way we talk? Or have we decided to prevent ourselves it's actually too costly to portray Christ in our lives?

The cost is too much as it will lead to ridicule and mockery and so we try and hide it away suppress the truth of Christ within us. Have great confidence in your God.

[ 22 : 04 ] Be sure that the God who enabled Peter and John to stand out for Jesus is the God who will enable you to stand out for God in a world that wishes to ignore his truth and to suppress the truth of the gospel.

The court acknowledged the impressiveness of these men though they ignored the message they brought. We cannot win people for Christ.

That is God's business. Our business is to faithfully represent God in our day-to-day lives. Are we going into the world as missionaries ensuring that the exclusivity of Christ is proclaimed to those around us?

In verse 16 we find that the Sanhedrin are anxious. They're a bit unsettled. They need to make a decision about these men but it's not going to be an easy one.

Their problem is not insignificant. They have dragged two men into court and they have nothing on which to charge them. If they conjured up some charges the city will be in uproar.

[ 23 : 09 ] These men are hero worship. These men are loved by the people. People are flocking to hear the message that they bring. On the other hand if they let these men off this Jesus is going to take off again.

The message of this Jesus and his resurrection is going to become more and more popular. We don't want that. We can't have the proclamation of Christ in this town. So the Sanhedrin in verse 18 declare to Peter and John in the strongest possible terms that they do not want to hear any more about Jesus.

That they do not want Peter and John to spread the gospel any more. That they want Peter and John to go back to their fishing boats and just do their day-to-day things. They want Peter and John not to preach.

Unfortunately for the Sanhedrin Peter and John aren't so easily pressured. When it comes to who they will serve they are going to put the king of kings as the one they will serve before the king. And if anyone tries to convince them otherwise they will disobey the human force the earthly power and they will focus on the king of kings. The solid determination to do God's work by Peter and John is illustrated in the life of Andrew Melville who stood up to James VI of Scotland who was trying to interfere in the preaching of the gospel.

[ 24 : 46 ] Melville addressed these words to James We must discharge our duty or else be traitors both to Christ and to you for there are two kings in Scotland there is King James the head of the commonwealth and there is Christ Jesus the king of the church whose subject James VI is of whose kingdom he is not a lord not a king but a member.

We will yield to you your place and give you all due obedience but you are not the head of the church you cannot give eternal life nor can you deprive us of it we charge you therefore to permit us freely to meet and to preach in Christ's name.

Are we too easily swayed by the pressure of the world to be quiet about our faith? Or are we men and women of conviction who will stand for the great king just as Peter and John and Melville did? Do we meekly accept the advice of the world to be quiet to keep our faith personal or do we accept the teaching of our king Lord Jesus to take our faith into the marketplace to proclaim the message of the risen Lord Jesus to the world around us?

Peter knew that he needed to make the most of every opportunity he had. We will be faced in this world with either hostility or appreciation for the message we bring.

[ 26 : 16 ] In the face of opposition we don't need to be afraid for he who is with us is stronger than he who is against us.

Remember God's spirit dwells within us. He will meet our every need. He will enable us to speak of Christ. He will give us the courage like he gave Peter and John.

Then finally when faced with the pressures of the world to keep our faith private and refrain from speaking about our Lord and Saviour do not give in to what the world would have us do but ensure that God's will is our priority.

Amen. Let us pray. Heavenly Father we come to you this morning thanking you that Jesus is risen. Thanking you that we have a message to declare and Lord we pray that as we go about our everyday lives that the name of Christ would be upon our lips that we would act as Christ would have us act and that we will be guided by your spirit.

[ 27 : 31 ] Lord we pray that as we go out into the world that many would taste and see that God is good through our ministry and through our work under your direction. Lord we pray that you continue with us as we sing your praise for we ask this in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.