

PROCLAIMING JESUS IN THE MIDST OF PERSECUTION

ACTS 4:1-12

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

All of us have seen the recruiting sign saying that Uncle Sam "**wants you.**" Another announces that "**the Marines are looking for a few good men.**" God wants all people to be saved (**I Timothy 2:4**) and He does not wish for any to perish (**II Peter 3:9**). At the same time, God is looking for certain traits which please Him, and which are exemplified by good men and women of the Bible.

God wants people like Noah who will practice justice.

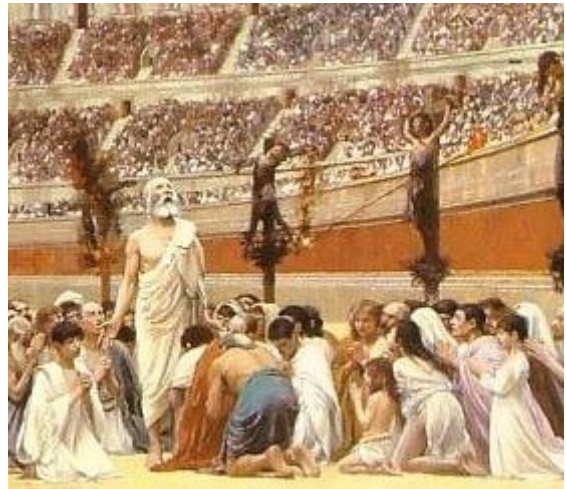
God wants people of purity like Joseph.

God wants parents like Lois, and Eunice, who teach their children faith in Him.

God wants lonely individuals like Enoch, who serve Him in spite of wicked surroundings.

God wants courageous disciples like Peter and John.

By Jesus' power, Peter and John healed a lame man. This created great attention and attracted a crowd eager to hear what they had to say (**Acts 3:1-11**).



Peter tells them that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the Father of Jesus Christ, and that through Jesus they may find the blessed fulfillment of all God's Old Testament promises and prophecies (**Acts 3:12-26**).

The self-centered religious leaders heard of this, and through envy they jailed Peter and John over night. The next morning they "grilled" them, but the apostles simply witnessed to them about the Lord as well! In a quick private conference, the leaders decided to sternly warn Peter and John, and then to turn them loose (**Acts 4:1-18**).

I. NOTICE THE PERSECUTION OF THE SAINTS: Acts 4:1-4

A. NOTICE THE SERMON INVOLVED: Acts 4:1A

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

It always helps to have a miracle before a preacher gets into the pulpit. That will stir a preacher up.

It was 3 p.m. when Peter begins to preach ([Acts 3:1](#)) and it was evening when he was interrupted ([Acts 4:3](#)). Thus he had been preaching for three hours.

Peter was willing to preach and they were hungry for God's Word.

A man asked a preacher "Are you going to preach a good sermon this morning?" The preacher said, "What is a good sermon?" The man replied, "A short sermon." (**He wouldn't have liked to have heard Peter**)

Looking back on his sermon, he turned the attention from himself to Jesus. He was like John the Baptist who said, I must decrease in order that he may increase.

When we stand as Christians, we must realize that we are nothing and Jesus is everything.

A young preacher was getting ready to preach his first sermon. He received a note from his mother. It read, I don't know what you text will be, but be sure to brag on Jesus.

Illustration:

A short man wanted to drive a nail in a wall to hang a big picture. He stood on a chair, but it was not high enough. His wife set out a small box and, balancing himself precariously, he began to give the nail hesitating taps with the hammer. His wife said, "Why don't you give a brave blow or two, and settle it?" He replied, "How can a man give a brave blow or two when he is standing on a foundation like this?" **-Mike Hanna (Peter had a good foundation in Jesus and he preached Him.)**

I wonder if Peter felt a pain as he spoke about their denial in [Acts 3:14](#)?

B. NOTICE THE SOURCE INVOLVED: Acts 4:1B-2

"the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2 being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

This persecution wasn't from the liquor crowd, or the gambling crowd, but it was from the religious crowd.

These priests and Sadducees were the main religious leaders of the nation. Twenty-four groups of priests served in rotation for the temple duties. The captain of the temple guard was one of the priests who was considered second in authority only to the high priest. The Sadducees made up one of the four parties of religious leaders in Israel (along with Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots). They denied the supernatural, denied the resurrection of the dead, and believed that Israel had been in the Messianic age since the

time of the Maccabees 150 years earlier. They saw no need for a Messiah and were offended by the apostolic message of the Gospel. Their interest was simply to maintain their political power by not rocking the boat with the Roman government.

Why were the Priest there? Because Jesus rebuked their deadness.

Why was the Captain of the Guard there? Because he was afraid he would lose his job.

Why was the Sadducees there? Because they had to reason everything out and they couldn't not reason out the resurrection.

There is still much opposition to Jesus and the gospel today. Let a man stand to preach Jesus and denounce sin and he will get opposed.

I heard the story of an Army Chaplin who preached Jesus was the only way to Heaven and denounced sin. He was called in and let go. They sent a note to Headquarters which said; don't send us any more evangelists.

We will even face opposition from within our ranks when we preach this Bible and Jesus the way of Salvation.

The temple of truth has never suffered so from woodpeckers on the outside as from the termites on the inside. - **Vance Havner**

C. NOTICE THE SUFFERING INVOLVED: Acts 4:3

“And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.”

They put them into custody until the next day because it was illegal under Jewish law to have a trial by night, though this is what the Jewish rulers did to Jesus.

Members of the Islamic Jihad massacred 15 Protestant Copts and one Muslim in and around an Egyptian village in early May of 2006, the latest in a series of attacks on Christians in that country. The massacre is reportedly the worst in Egypt in a decade. In one incident, three Christians were killed while harvesting in the wheat field of a Muslim who was also killed for hiring them.-**Compass News Service**

In the Western world, Christians rarely face persecution. Satan instead has attacked us with worldliness, selfish pride, a need for acceptance, and status. The martyr can impress unbelievers with his courage and faith; the self-centered, compromising Christian is despised by the world.

Patrick Henry said one day to the law officials who had arrested some preachers for proclaiming Jesus, aren't there any thieves to arrest? **(These disciples had been arrested for simply preaching Jesus)**

D.L. Moody was asked one time if he had grace enough to be burned at the stake. He replied, "All I know is that I want enough grace to preach tonight." **(God gave the disciples enough grace to bear up their imprisonment.**

D. NOTICE THE SALVATION INVOLVED: Acts 4:4

"Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

'Howbeit' in spite of this trouble the Church grew, the number of Christians keeps increasing; growing from 3,000 to 5,000 at last count (**Acts 2:41**). Opposition did not slow the church down at all.

I am glad when these people were confronted with the Gospel, they didn't put it off making the decision. Many today are talking about being saved, yet their day of salvation has not happen yet.

Illustration:

"Mother, please," exploded the teenager. "I've heard all the religion business I can take. You and Daddy are always bothering me about it. I'm not interested!" The girl stamped her foot and marched out of the room, slamming the door. Her mother sank wearily to a chair. What more could she do? Finally she decided to call the pastor. The pastor listened to the problem and made an appointment to see the girl alone. When the pastor called on the girl the parents left the room and he turned sympathetically to the girl. "I think it's a shame," he said, "that your mother and father pester you so much about religion." The girl, who had been braced for a lecture, smiled in relief. Now this is the kind of preacher I like, she thought. He's willing to leave me alone if I am not interested. "I have a suggestion," said the pastor. "Suppose I persuade your parents and friends not to mention the subject of God to you for a whole year." The girl was startled. "A year," she gasped. "I don't know whether it would be safe to wait a whole year. I might die before then." "That's true," agreed the pastor. "A year is too long. Suppose we make it six months?" The girl pondered a moment and then replied that six months might not be safe either. "Well, then," proposed the pastor, "how about three months? I'll arrange it so you won't be bothered about God for three months." The pastor stood up and started to leave, but the girl stopped him. "I don't think it would be safe," she said, "to put it off at all. Please pray with me now." Promptly they got down on their knees and the teenager asked Jesus into her heart. **—Paul Fritz**

II. NOTICE THE PROCLAMATION OF SIMON: Acts 4:5-12

A. NOTICE THE PEOPLE THAT ARE MENTIONED: Acts 4:5-6

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6 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."

Rulers, elders, and scribes: These Jewish rulers are the same ones who recently condemned Jesus to death. Peter and John, standing before the Jewish rulers, must have thought that the trial of Jesus was going to happen all over again and they would be crucified like their Master, but it didn't seem to matter.

They were willing to suffer because Jesus had saved them. He was their chief delight. They didn't expect a free ride in this life.

Illustration:

A man once said to Sam Jones, "Jones, the church is putting my assessment too high." Jones asked, "How much do you pay?" "Five dollars a year," was the reply. "Well," said Jones, "how long have you been converted?" "About four years," was the answer. "Well, what did you do before you were converted?" "I was a drunkard." "How much did you spend for drink?" "About \$250.00 a year." "How much were you worth?" "I rented land and plowed with a steer." "What have you got now?" "I have a good plantation and a span of horses." "Well," said Sam Jones, "you paid the devil \$250.00 a year for the privilege of plowing with a steer on rented land, and now you don't want to give the God who saved you five dollars a year for the privilege of plowing with horses on your own plantation. You are a rascal from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet." - **Melvin Pursur**

B. NOTICE THE POWER THAT IS MENTIONED: Acts 4:7-8

“And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, by what power, or by what name, have ye done this? 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,”

Peter had lost his courage at the fire with the little maiden but now in front of 70 hardnosed men, he shows courage? Why?

He is instantly filled with the Spirit again, evident by his supernatural boldness and ability to speak directly to the heart of the matter. The filling of the Holy Spirit Peter experienced in **Acts 2:4** (along with other disciples) was not a one-time event; it was something God wanted to keep doing in their lives.

In his flesh, he was a coward, but in the Spirit, he is a whirlwind for God. We may stumble in our proclamation of the Gospel, but God uses the words we can speak and brings conviction through His Spirit.

Illustration:

A country preacher prayed all night for a soldier. He went in the morning to see him. He put his arm around him, and all he could do was cry, and say, “God wants you to be saved.” God used those words to convict him and he was saved. -**Karl Riley**

C. NOTICE THE PROMISE THAT IS MENTIONED: Acts 4:9-12

“If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10 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. 11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Peter doesn't merely proclaim Jesus as a way of salvation, but as the only way of salvation. The idea that there is no salvation in any other, and that there is no other name under heaven given among men by whom we must be saved is an offensive one in our pluralistic, eclectic age; but it is the plain teaching of the Bible.

Illustration:

A husband and his wife went to the State Fair every year. Every year the man would say to his wife, "I'd like to ride in that airplane." And every year his wife would say, "I know honey, but that airplane ride costs ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars." Then one year, they went to the fair and the man said to his wife, "I'm 71 years old now. If I don't ride that airplane this year, I may never get another chance." His wife replied, "Honey, that airplane ride costs ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars." The pilot overheard their conversation and said, "Folks, I'll make you a deal. I'll take you both up for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say one word, I won't charge you, but if you say one word it'll cost you ten dollars." The husband and wife agreed. The pilot takes them up and does all kinds of twists and turns, rolls and dives, but not a word is heard. He does all his tricks over again, but still not a word. Finally they land and the pilot turns to the husband, "By golly, I did everything I could think of to get you to say something, but you didn't." The husband replied, "Well, I was gonna say something when my wife fell out, but ten dollars is ten dollars." —**John Mence**

There are times to keep quiet and there are times to speak up! Brothers and sisters in Christ, the time for us to speak up is now! Sharing our stories of what God has done for us is at the heart of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. This is the burden and the joy of every Christian.

There was a new body for a lame man in that name, sight for the blind man in that name, life for dead Lazarus in that name, forgiveness for the woman at the well in that name, and salvation for Eddie Ildefonso as well as you in that name.

W. A. Criswell tells of an experience he had as a boy with a wicked man. He heard the man got saved one Sunday night. The next morning, he looked over the fence as the man was milking his cow. The cow kicked the bucket over and got milk on his clothes. Instead of cursing, he wiped the milk off and started singing, *“Oh, How I love Jesus.”*

The salvation that Jesus gives will change a person's life even in a hard situation.

CONCLUSION- A Man who was an alcoholic got saved. His former drinking buddies tried to tempt him to drink again. He refused and they threw a glass of whiskey in his face to tempt him more. He lifted his head toward heaven and began to cry and say, "O Jesus, Jesus, help me." And He did, and he walked away without taking a drink.

3,000 cried out to Jesus and He did help, Peter cried out Jesus and He did help. If you cry out to Him today, He will do it today.