

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

**SERMON: Acts 4:23-31****IF SUPPRESSED FOR PREACHING CHRIST, ASK BOLDNESS!**

*And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said:*

*“Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:*

*Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.*

*For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”*

*And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*

I like to think every Christian knows and thinks about sharing Christ with others, and that every Christian has at least tried to do so, if not with a stranger, then with an acquaintance or relative. Have you? What have you learned? That rarely is the witness well received. Often you the Christian feel uncomfortable, intimidated, reluctant to do so again. --- And that's the plan! the devil's plan. To suppress the proclamation of God's forgiveness, love, eternal salvation, and every blessing, given in Jesus the crucified and risen Savior. To suppress the preaching of Jesus! But how to overcome that pattern?

In our text Peter and John had just given a bold witness for salvation in Jesus. It was not many days since Jesus had visibly ascended into heaven before their very eyes and only a few days since the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had promised them, came down upon the disciples on the first Christian Pentecost. At Pentecost 3000 were baptized and added to the group of believers. During the days following, Acts tells us Peter and John entered the temple to pray. A man crippled from birth, over forty years old, was lying at the gateway begging. Peter and John did not have silver or gold to give him, but gave him something more valuable! “In the name of Jesus, arise and walk!” The man was healed! A large crowd gathered wondering “What in the world?!” Peter proclaimed to the crowds, that they, Peter and John, had not healed this man by their own power. It was in the name of and by the power of Jesus, whom they had denied and killed, but whom God raised from the dead. In Jesus there was healing for the body, but even more, refreshing, forgiveness of sins--their sins—for their hearts, and restoration before God. This restoration would be fulfilled at the last day, when Christ returns. God had promised it and proclaimed it from the first fall into sin. Many believed in Christ that day and were added to the believers.

It sounds like a very pleasant reaction to their witness for Christ, doesn't it? But the devil was not far behind. Quickly, the chief priests and all the Sadducees gathered at the temple to stop this nonsense. You do remember, don't you, that the vast majority of Jewish priests were of the party of the Sadducees and that the Sadducees completely denied ANY resurrection of the dead! They were incensed! Peter and John were seized by these official and thrown into jail. The next day Peter and John were taken to a meeting of the “Big Boys”—the leaders, the elders, the high priests and family—the same ones who had crucified Christ. It was a meeting bent on intimidation—to make Peter and John “timid” about preaching Christ the Savior. It was a meeting bent on using threats and fear to suppress the preaching of Christ. Peter and John, unlearned and untrained fishermen that they were, nevertheless remained adamant. “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

What made Peter and John so undeterred, even when the re-action of the leaders was so forceful against them? Think about Peter. As you heard in the Gospel reading, he said, “Depart, from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” He was unfit to be a disciple of Jesus. Then when he thought he finally knew something, and when Jesus spoke of His forthcoming crucifixion, Peter said, “Lord, may it never be!” Jesus reprimanded Peter for such words coming from Satan. The night of Jesus' arrest, “Lord, if all deny You, I never will. I will even die for You.” Yet Peter denied Jesus three times—with oaths and cursing. The Lord looked at him and Peter wept bitterly. This unreliable sinful Peter, however, was forgiven and reinstated by the Lord after His resurrection. “Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs.” There was no question, Peter and John would continue preaching Jesus the Savior's name!

For you also. Regardless of how praiseworthy you look in the eyes of the world and/or your own family, you have disappointed and failed Jesus grievously in sin. Yet by way of His death and resurrection for you, by way of faith in Him, you are forgiven and declared righteous by God! Go forth and bear witness! Do not let the devil intimidate and suppress your witness.

Yet threats, suppression, manipulation, intimidation come, and it's easy to cave-in to Satan. Our text says, *And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord.* Peter and John gathered with fellow believers for encouragement. They prayed to God. That is what you also have open for you. Rather than crawl into a shell like a turtle after being rebuffed for being a messenger of forgiveness and salvation in Christ, gather with fellow Christians for encouragement. Talk about it with your wife or husband, father or mother, church family or pastor. Seek mutual encouragement. Is not this what is written in Hebrews? *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:24-25).

In our text, the group prayed, *Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said* [in Psalm 2]: *Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.* They recognized that the devil uses ungodly government and ungodly leaders to squelch the preaching of Christ. *For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together.* Even on this happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. Do you nevertheless recognize that forces within our own country, even particular leaders, gather together against Christ and salvation in Christ?

What do you do? Realize that world and national events do not take place in a vacuum. They only take place as the Lord allows and to serve the Lord's purposes of preaching Christ. They *gathered together* [as opposition forces] *to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.* The Lord, who made this world and can stop any opposition anytime, allowed them to crucify Christ. It was for our salvation. He allowed them to persecute the early Christians. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church--the believers scattered, taking Christ with them to others. The Lord is aware of what is going on today as well, in our nation and around the world. Though the devil is bent on squelching the preaching of forgiveness and the resurrection of eternal life in Jesus, the Lord only allows that which in the end undermines Satan at His own game and furthers the preaching of the Gospel.

The unhappy events in Europe some 400 years ago led colonists to come to America to seek a new life. It was all under God's hand. A new nation, the USA was established, whose birth we celebrate 245 years ago today. This nation has served as a bastion, a nest for the preaching of Christ to our own people and people abroad. Your own forefathers came here and struggled mightily to live in this new land. It was all part of God's plan to further the preaching of Christ. When foes from without and within, even within the name of the Christian church itself, arise to hinder and becloud the Truth today, the Lord is in control and will only use it to further the preaching of Christ in His best way. Our nation itself may go to ruin and fall (we pray not). Our church body may go to ruin and fall, (we pray not). Yet the Christian Church and the preaching of Christ will prosper. God will see to it.

*Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.* Peter and John and the Jerusalem believers, when intimidated by such high forces, prayed for boldness! Boldness to talk even louder, boldness to talk even more. They prayed that Jesus would be with their preaching and make it evident that this was His message for the forgiveness and eternal salvation of souls. What to do when you and I are suppressed? Pray for more boldness and keep on “trucking” with the Gospel of Christ! What to do when our congregation or our church body or Christianity at large are suppressed? Pray for more boldness and keep on “trucking” with the Gospel of Christ!

*And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.* The Lord answered their prayer. They proclaimed Christ the Savior boldly. And He will send the Holy Spirit to aid your witness with boldness also! Keep on “trucking” with the Gospel of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ!

*The Church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend, to guide, sustain, and cherish is with her to the end. Though there be those that hate her—false sons withing her pale—against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail!* (TLH 473 v. 3). Pray for boldness!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---