

On MISSION

2 Truths about Evangelism

Acts 4 :1-22

Testimony: It is so good to be back at Edgewood Baptist Church. I've said it many times and let me repeat it this morning. We consider you all family...even though this family has grown since we were here...we are excited to meet many of you! Pastor Brian inherited us (whether he wanted to or not), but he is such an encouragement to our family. I'm thrilled to see how the Lord is blessing you all. Who got coffee at the café today? How great is that...besides, I don't want you sleeping during the message today so load up.

You have been such a blessing to us over the years and thank you again for your very generous love gift to help us get set back up here in the States. We didn't expect it...didn't even know you were doing so till Pastor Dan contacted us about it. WOW! THANK YOU!

If you asked me 6 months ago where I would be this morning, I would have answered preaching in Burkina Faso at one of the churches. Most of you know we had 6 months left on our term before coming home for a year furlough. God had other plans. Burkina Faso continues to battle Radical Islam and terrorism...which really began to spike in 2016. Recently, I read in the month of Jan. alone, there were 110 killed by Terrorist in Burkina. Although there have been attacks all over the country, it is the northern and eastern regions that are most targeted. We felt like the capital of Ouagadougou was still safe enough for our family; however, we had varied our patterns and behavior to become a harder target. Around Thanksgiving our world turned upside down. The Friday prior, I had several emails and a 45-minute phone call with the missions office about a rumor the embassy was forcing embassy families to send their children home due to insecurity. FYI, our missions office is on top of security, and had been monitoring the situation. I talked them into letting us stay a while longer to see if things continued to deteriorate. Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving, the embassy officially announced the departure of all minors under 21, the voluntary departure of non-essential personnel that would like to leave with their families, and that they were increasing the security advisory level to a level 4 (do not travel). I believe there are 13 or 14 countries in the world that are currently a level four (Iran, Yemen, North Korea, etc.) I was gone much of that day doing registration paperwork at a government office. Before I could even respond, our sending church and the missions office had made a proactive decision and asked us to leave immediately. We had around 2 1/2 weeks to sell everything, close up our house, transition ministry responsibilities, etc. It was nuts!

Despite the craziness, God blessed! I wish I could share some of the stories of the Lord's grace during that time...but I still want to preach. 😊 God continues to bless the ministry of Burkina Faso which you all are a HUGE part of. I want to share a short video of what God is doing.

- 5-minute video presentation

INTRODUCTION:

I remember back in 2004, when we were preparing to leave Edgewood and start deputation (our fund-raising tour), Burkina Faso was this peaceful little place in the middle of several countries that had experienced much turmoil due to tribal conflicts. Our major concern was surviving the year-round heat. 😊 I would have never dreamed the country the Lord called us to would become a dangerous place for Christians to live.

Persecution is not new. I want us to look at a passage you looked at a few weeks ago. This morning, I want to highlight 2 biblical principles (which you already know) and illustrate them through some stories.

Stand with me as we read God's word together...

Act 4:1-3 *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, (2) greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (3) And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.*

Today, we are going to focus on verses 1-4. However, the story begins in Chapter 3 and continues thru the end of Ch. 4.

CONTEXT:

This is shortly after the ascension of our Lord (Acts 1) and Pentecost (ch. 2). Peter and John went to the temple during the hour of prayer (9th hour *Ch. 3:1 = 3 pm*). They met a handicapped beggar that was placed at the gate of the temple. Peter heals him. This a big deal! Everyone knew him (3:16...they knew him). I imagine he was there daily, asking for alms. He might have been there for years. 4:22 says he was more than 40 years old.

Peter and John used the occasion to preach Christ. Look at verse 3:12-15

Act 3:12-16 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? (13) The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. (14) But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, (15) and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. (16) And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Theme: What lessons (or truths) can we learn from the experience of Peter and John in Acts 4?

I. Truth # 1 (Acts 4:1-3) Expect Opposition

NB : This might sound like the most elementary principle, but we need to be reminded.

- A. Peter and John are arrested by (of all people) those that were religious...*the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees*
 1. Why arrested?
 - a. This happened shortly after Christ's crucifixion and I'm sure they didn't appreciate His disciples continuing the Lord's ministry
 - b. One commentary notes the captain of the guards were probably concerned about the large gathering. They were to keep order. Probably didn't want any problems with Rome if something were to break out in the Temple
 - c. Interesting that the Sadducees are mentioned. Verse 2 explains another issue - *(2) greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.* Sadducees didn't believe in a bodily resurrection and would have been quite perturbed by the Apostles' doctrine.

Note: As a Christian, it should be no surprise that people will oppose you because of your faith.

B. Satan will oppose you.

1. In fact, he not only opposes you, but wants to destroy you.

1Pe 5:8 *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

2. Christ warned us in Matt. 10 (Context: He's sending the disciples out for the first time)

Mat 10:16 *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

Mat 10:24-25 *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (25) It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.*

Pastor Brian highlighted some interesting statistics a few weeks ago, and I want to go over them with you again this morning: (Open Doors just released their World Watch List for 2019...)

- More than 260 million Christians – one of every eight believers – experience high levels of persecution.
- A total of 9,488 places of worship were attacked.
- 3,711 Christians were detained without trial, sentenced and imprisoned.
- 2,983 followers of Christ were killed for faith-related reasons.

NB: (50 countries where it is the most dangerous to follow Christ: **Burkina Faso who was never ranked in the past, is now #28 on the list.**

Illustration: In February alone, 2 churches have been attacked. During the most recent attack, the Islamic terrorists killed 24, wounded others, and took 3 young people as hostages (*the latest reports include villagers in that number*).

Illustration: Although we have been aware of increased terrorist activity, it hit home when one of our churches was directly affected on a Tuesday evening at the end of June 2019. I mentioned it briefly in the video. It is the church in a northern village I inherited (when Missionary Cooley left the field in 2009). That day, 3 people were executed, including one man from the church. Later I found out Idrissa was in the BI, and was the right hand man of the pastor. He left a wife and, I think, 8 kids behind. Although we are still greatly saddened, we know where Idrissa is today.

2Co 5:8 *Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

But there is more to the story. The evening of the attack, there was a prayer meeting scheduled. They were varying the days and meeting in houses rather than the building to become a harder target. The pastor should have been already in the village, but he was running late coming back from working the fields. He met a villager outside that village who told him terrorists had passed by and encouraged him to take a goat path into the village instead of the main road for protection. However, as he contemplated what to do, he felt compelled to take the road and seek shelter at a friend's house till they could get more info. Come to find out, the terrorists were waiting along the goat path. He would have been killed.

...Wait, it gets more interesting! Another one of our pastors in the North, who we helped start a workout of the existing church, had come back that afternoon to visit family and the church in that same village. Knowing the

terrorists usually attack in the morning or evening, he decided to stay outside of town till dark and work in the family field. He said sometime after 5pm, he put down his hoe and went for a walk. When he heard all the motorcycles, he knew something was wrong. He ducked down in a field and 2 armed men stopped within a couple yards from where he left his hoe to answer their phone...next to a different goat path. He was hunkered down about 30 yards out and was not seen. Most likely he would have been killed as well since they know the identity of most pastors in the region. Later, He told me he almost sent me a message saying, "see you in heaven". I'm glad he didn't. I would have called him all night giving away his hiding place when his phone rang. 😊

Question: You might ask, why were the Pastors miraculously saved, but not the man from the church? I don't know...I'll never know.

- Heb. 11 is the great faith chapter. We have stories of people like Noah, Abraham and Moses. How through faith God did amazing things through their lives...often miraculously saving them. Then he says in vs. 36...

Heb 11:36-38 Others *suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— (38) of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

APPLICATION – If we understand going into this thing called Christianity, that there will be persecution, it can help us to deal with the opposition. It can help us avoid depression and discouragement. It can shift the framework of thinking to what Peter said in I Peter 4:

1Pe 4:12-13 Beloved, *do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (13) But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

Theme: What lessons (or truths) can we learn from the experience of Peter and John in Acts 4?

II. Truth #2 (Acts 4:4) Persecution can help advance the Gospel.

Act 4:4 *But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.*

- A. **BUT...** In spite of the persecution, the number of believers grew to around 5,000
1. At Pentecost – there was around 120 believers present. Act 1:15 *In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said,*
 2. Some might have already gone home, because I Cor. 15 said Christ appeared to more than 500. 1Co 15:6 *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*
 3. Pentecost (after the sermon): Act 2:41 *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*
 4. This growth happened in a matter of days. 120 > 5000. WOW!

Application: Think about this for a minute. They know who Jesus was...they know He was crucified. In verse 3, Peter and John are arrested before their very eyes for preaching the message of Christ. Despite the obvious risks, MANY BELIEVED...BECAME CHRISTIANS.

B. God can use persecution to advance the Gospel

1. **Illustration: Acts 8 – after the stoning of Stephen and Acts 7.**

Act 8:4-5 Now *those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (5) Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

- a. **Saul, who we know would later become Paul, is persecuting the church**
- b. **Diaspora...Scattering of seeds (explain)**

2. Paul explains the persecution he experienced helped to advance the Gospel

Php 1:12-14 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, (13) so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. (14) And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

- a. His imprisonment had contributed the advancement in some way.
- b. He explains in verse 14... *are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

Illustration: I remember being at Edgewood during our internship, and Pastor Mel brought Vernon Brewer from World Help in to preach. I was sitting over in this section to the left. Although it's been years ago, I'll never forget it. He shared the story of a Chinese Pastor he had visited that had been severely persecuted. In and out of prison, beaten, and if I remember correctly, his daughter was killed as a result of her faith in Christ. And Vernon Brewer told us this that day...it's stuck with me...**He said that this Chinese pastor told him NOT to pray that the persecution would stop, but that God would give them the strength to endure. WOW!**

Joke: I remember thinking, I'm glad I'm not going to a country where Christians fear for their lives.

Application to Burkina: I think God can use the situation we are presently in to do something great. I think that nominal Muslims who are not in agreement with the terrorism that is taking place, are going to be more open than ever to the Gospel message. I've already seen a few things that are encouraging.

1. During our month-long Adult campaign, one of our men – Francis, brought 16 visitors over the course of that month. We had more visitors this year than ever before. Most were not Muslims, but backslidden Christians who seem to be more conscious of spiritual things during this time of terrorism by radical Muslims.
 - o One of those visitors has remained faithful and feels called into ministry. Pastor said he will be entering the Weekend BI, and he's already started discipling the young man.
2. Our church runs around 45 adults on a normal Sunday. Pastor called me a couple of weeks ago. They had 70 adults in the auditorium on a regular Sunday. He told me last week they haven't had a Sunday below 50. Despite the fear, our church is growing.

Pray with us that God will use this time of turmoil to wake up Christians, soften hearts of those who are not saved, and further His Kingdom.

NB: Some believe we should pray for the persecution of Christians if it means more will be saved. 😊

CONCLUSION

Theme: What lessons (or truths) can we learn from the experience of Peter and John in Acts 4?

I. Truth # 1 (Acts 4:1-3) Expect Opposition

II. Truth #2 (Acts 4:4) Persecution can help advance the Gospel.

These are all wonderful truths we can apply to our lives. Understanding these truths will help us when we live out the Great Commission.

PRACTICAL ACTION STEPS:

1. We need to change our view of persecution:

- Expect it to happen. (In the USA, it is very unlikely that you will be killed for your faith, but how many have been mocked or rejected because you are a Christian?) It is just part of being a disciple of Christ, and we need to remember the world treated our Savior badly, it will be the same with His followers.
- Peter said rejoice when we are persecuted. Paul said Php 3:10 that *I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, ...* I'd be lying if I said that I was there spiritually. I'm not too excited about suffering. I'm not praying for it. 😊 However, that should be where we are headed spiritually. Yes, I got mocked for my faith today, but it's ok. It must mean I'm doing something right because Christ said it would happen.

1. **Don't be discouraged and quit.** Jesus warned us this would happen. We need to understand it is a part of Evangelism.

2. **Pray in advance for strength** from our Sovereign God and trust in Him.

3. **Understand your role as an evangelist.**

a. You are a messenger... YOU DON'T SAVE ANYONE! That is the Lord's work

b. Ultimately, they are not rejecting you, but JESUS CHRIST.

2. Pray for those who are being persecuted.

- The fact we can intercede for someone a half a world away is incredible. We can approach God's throne of Grace and pray for these individuals.

3. Pray God will use persecution once again to further the Gospel.

4. Make sure you are doing your part to get the Gospel out locally and globally.

- Each one of us are called to be a Gospel witness. God expects this of you. It's a non-negotiable. You are a mouthpiece for the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- At the end of this story, in verse 18-20, we see a proper perspective about persecution and the Gospel.

Act 4:18-20 *So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. (19) But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, (20) for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."*

Let us be faithful to be obedient to God and share the wonderful things He has done in our lives.