

“Compelled By the Cornerstone”

Acts 4:1-2

If you have your Bibles, turn to Acts 4. We're going to be looking at verses 1-22 this evening. As you're turning there I'm going to share with you a story about my friend when he was buying his first house. Now my friend is one of those men who loves to get a deal. And so, as he was thinking about the first home he was going to buy, he was scouring Zillow for the best house that he could afford in the best neighborhood and get a really good deal. He came across this one house, and this house was in a neighborhood he typically could not afford, is a little out of their range, but this house was in their price range. And this house was beautiful. He had completely been renovated, completely been redone. And again it was accessible to their budget. So he calls his real estate agent and he says, hey, I really like this house. Will, you set up a showing for us. And so the real estate agent does, and the day comes when he and his wife are to show up to this home, and they get out of the car and waiting in front of them in the front yard is this real estate agent who said before you go any further, before you walk into this house and before you fall in love with this house, know this. I am not going to let you buy this house. He said, what do you mean you're not going to let me buy this house? I will not let you buy this house. This house is beautiful. It's completely redone on the inside. It's been renovated. Yes. It's in your price range. Yes. It seems like a good deal, but what you don't see on Zillow is that if you go down to the basement, the foundation has cracks all over it. It will be a headache and a problem for you for as long as you own this house and you will never be able to sell it. I am not going to let you buy this house. And sure enough, as they walked in, they walked around enamored by the beauty of the interior, the completely redone cabinets and countertops, the new flooring. It was a beautiful house, and they were trying not to fall in love with the house. And as the real estate agent took them down to the basement, it says, here, here, I want to show you something. Look at the cracks in the foundation. Look at what's going on here. This home, though outwardly beautiful, is crumbling from the inside. It's got a faulty foundation. You cannot buy this house. The point he was making. The point for us is that your foundation matters. It matters when you're buying a home, right? When you're spending a lot of money and making a huge investment into something that you may live in for years to come that has implications on you. You're that foundation of that house matters. But more so. Your foundation and your spiritual life matters more. Your eternal life, the foundation of your eternal life, your foundation of your hope matters more.

We're going to look at a story this this evening where Peter and John get arrested and they stand before the Sanhedrin and they're being accused. They're being interrogated, and they flip the conversation with these elders, with these rulers, and they begin to have a conversation about their foundation, and John and Peter and their boldness and their conviction point out to all these religious leaders, your foundation is faulty. And so that's what we're going to look at this evening. And this text. What does it mean to have Christ as our cornerstone, our sure foundation? And what implications does that have for us in gospel ministry. So, I'm going to read through this text. I'm going to read a few verses, explain, talk about some applications.

But before we get there I want to give a little bit of backstory of chapter three. In chapter three, Peter and John are going up to the temple to worship God, to make their sacrifices. The New Testament church at this time was just recently birth, and there really wasn't a place for them to

worship and to have gathered services. They were meeting in the temple, in the temple courts. So they were going there frequently, and as they were going up, they meet this crippled man, this man who has been lame, who could not walk since birth. And each day a group of people would set him at the beautiful gate, and he would beg for alms, beg for mercy given because he could not provide for himself, and his worshipers would go up to worship, they would give to him and care for him. And Peter and John meet him this one day, and they say this to him, I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And immediately this man was healed, and he went leaping and rejoicing and praising God in the temple. Now, as you can imagine, this created a commotion. A lot of people wanted to know what in the world just happened, because they probably knew this man. They probably had given to this man, seen him year after year, decade after decade there, and are astonished and wondered what in the world happened to cause him to be able to walk. So Peter and John, not wanting to miss an opportunity to share the gospel for that is what they're commissioned to do, preaches a sermon. And as we're about to read, many come to faith. But this causes a problem with the temple authorities, with the rulers. And they're going to face opposition for the very first time in this New Testament church. For the very first time, we have recorded in the book of Acts and the history of the New Testament church opposition is going to be before these new Christians. How will Peter and John respond? What does it mean for us?

Let's pick up in verse one. We'll read verse one through four.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priest and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed, because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day. For it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of men came to about 5000. So the number of men that are in the New Testament church this time is about 5000.

You had women and children, you're over ten.

Significant movement of the gospels taking place. So Peter and John, after the sermon, are confronted by the captain of the temple and a group of Sadducees, and are put in a holding cell to the next day. Now who are the capital of the temple? Who's this first person that we meet? Well, the captain of the temple was the second in command, second in charge, second in authority to the chief priest or the high priest himself.

He was in charge of maintaining order, administration. And the happenings in the goings on in the temple. He led and oversaw the temple guard of the temple police. It was a very important figure and obviously very curious about what's going on. It got his attention. This commotion, this preaching, and the fact this new group of believers, these new Christians, weren't authorized to do what they did.

They weren't authorized to preach. Think about this. If we as brother would got up one Sunday morning, decided to go to the local synagogue, all a couple thousand of us and show up there and start preaching God's Word and the Christian message. Do you think that would be very warmly received? No, it certainly wasn't here. And so that cat, the captain of the guard, captain of the temple's attention.

And then we see these Sadducees. Now, who are the Sadducees? Well, there's several different religious groups stand the test of time that rose. We often talk about the Pharisees, but

we don't have to talk about the Sadducees. Now, the Sadducees were a group of wealthy people who came from who are typically priest or priestly families in Jerusalem, and they were very favorable with the Romans and accommodated greatly with them. One of their they had several different unique beliefs about them, and one of their beliefs is that they really only saw the first five books of the Old Testament as authoritative, and the rest of the Old Testament was really just commentary on those first five books, which led them to also deny the general resurrection. So when it says they were greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming and Jesus the resurrection from the dead that spoke against some of their core beliefs, they don't believe this.

Here you are in our temple preaching something we don't believe. This is not welcome here, but because it's late in the day, they arrest them and they put them in a holding cell. For them to face the Sanhedrin the next day. So what ministry principle can we pull out of this? So the first ministry principle that I want us to see from this is effective gospel witnesses are prepared to face opposition.

Effective gospel witnesses are prepared to face opposition. I like the word witnesses, because that is the command that Jesus gave to the apostles, to the disciples, before his ascension. He said, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth they were to witness to about the resurrection, that Christ rose from the dead.

And you too will rise from the dead if you believe in him. And there would be witnesses, and we too are to witness to that fact. So to be effective gospel witnesses, we need to be prepared to face opposition. Why? Because we have an enemy who hates God, who hates the gospel, who hates the Church of God as it goes forward in this world, we will face some sort of opposition, whether it's small or whether great.

You know, in our society, in our country, we typically have light persecution. We don't have the type of persecution you see in India or China or in the Middle East. Most of our opposition that we face is social, maybe social awkwardness, ostracization. Maybe we lose out on opportunities in our job or our business dealings. But some opposition that believers face around the world could lose their lives, or their jobs or their families.

But no matter where we live, we should expect opposition. As we push packed the darkness. We should expect the darkness to push right back. And Jesus told them this in Matthew chapter ten says, behold, I'm sending you out a sheep in the midst of wolves. So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in the synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

And when they deliver you over, do not be anxious about how you are to speak, or what are you to say, for you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For is not you who speak. Forget this, the spirit of your father speaking through you. What an incredible promise. You're going to face opposition. Peter says, don't be surprised at some as something unique or.

Unexpected thing that's happening to you. Expect it. But know this promise that when you face opposition, you're not alone. We see the Great Commission says all authority has been given to me, and he commissions them to go out to make disciples. We go with the authority of God, and

we go with the power of the Holy Spirit. He equips us in the midst of trial, suffering, and opposition to give us words to proclaim and to share.

We're not alone. Frank Barker in 1975, almost 50 years ago, preached a sermon on this text. This is what he said. Listen to this. Wherever there is effective evangelism, there will be controversy and opposition. I am very glad that Briarwood Presbyterian Church is a controversial church. I hope it always remains a controversial church. If we're not controversial, we're not doing God's work. That does not mean, of course, to be tactless or unnecessarily cause controversy. The gospel itself, when clearly proclaimed, causes controversy and opposition because the evil heart of man rebels against the demand of repentance and against the conviction that comes upon him when he is told of his guilt and his need of a Savior, the devil stirs up opposition and hatred to the Word of God.

That greatly encouraged me as I was reading and preparing for this sermon. Frank Barker, almost 50 years ago, was praying and proclaiming to this church, May we be a church of controversy. But again, not unnecessary controversy. But the gospel is controversial. May we stand upon it. And one of the evidences that we are actually doing the Lord's work is that we face opposition in it because we have an enemy.

Let's keep reading verse five. On the next day, the rulers and the elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and all who were at the high priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired by what power about what name did you do this?

And then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, who God raised from the dead by him, this man is standing before you.

Well, this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation and no one else. For there is no other name under heaven and among men, by which by which we must be saved. So the next day Peter and John had to stand in front of the Sanhedrin to give an answer to who gave them the power to do this.

They wanted to know. Is this power coming from other pagan deities? Is this coming from demonic influences? Where did you get this power? Did it come from God? Now the Sanhedrin, if you don't know what the Sanhedrin is, it's the highest ruling body in Israel. The highest court. It's made up of 70 elders and one high priest of 71 men.

They sat in a semi-circle. So you can imagine yourself as Peter and John, standing in front of the semi-circle and being interviewed and interrogated. About 71 and they were there on trial to give an account about what happened. And the main question they want to know is what authority gave them. The right and present was the high priestly family.

And it says Annas, who is the high priest. He wasn't the current high priest. He was the former high priest. Caiaphas is the current high priest. But just like we referred to, our presidents who have are no longer serving in office as President Clinton or President Obama, there still remain President, which shows is that Annas had a lot of influence still even there in that day.

And Caiaphas was there. Now, if you know your Bibles and know your history, what two men were very prominent in the trial of Jesus and Caiaphas was a part of that trial. The accused Jesus wrongly, that eventually led to his execution and crucifixion. And so they were there. So not lost on Peter and John is the fact that Jesus stood on trial in the very spot just a couple of months back.

They stood in his same place. But do you notice something different about Peter? What was Peter doing last time when Jesus was there, hiding from a little girl? What is he doing now? Standing bold, standing tall, standing confident. What happened? The Holy Spirit happened. The promised spirit that empowered them. They equipped them. That called him to this particular work.

They're there recognizing where they are in history. Then Peter preaches a sermon that has good three points. He's a good Presbyterian. The Catholics like to claim Peter, but he's really a Presbyterian. We know that because of his three point sermon right here. And here's his three points and his defense against them. He says this, number 1.1, the man was healed by Jesus's power, this crippled man, this lame man that we've seen for decades.

He was healed by Jesus. And guess what? You crucified him. You killed him. But God raised him from the dead. So you ask what power you ask with authority. We did this. We did this by Jesus, whom you crucified. Point number two, the long anticipated Messiah that the Old Testament spoke at length about who God's people were looking forward to, who will rescue God's people?

Is Jesus. How do we know that? Well, they quote Psalm 18, verse 22, which is a Psalm. That is dedicated to the Messiah. It gives reference to the Messiah. It's a prophecy of him. The Messiah will come and will be rejected. And so he's telling these rulers, these elders, the Sanhedrin. Congratulations. You made history a couple months back. You're a part of fulfilling prophecy. You're not holding back at all, are they?

And then, number three, the third point, which is the most controversial point? Your only hope for salvation is Jesus. Your only hope for salvation is Jesus is. Verse 12 says this. There is salvation and no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which you. We must be saved. Every single one of us need salvation. Every single one of us is under the judgment of God for our sins. Every single one of us is headed to eternity, separated from God and hell. Let's God's mercy and grace breaks in. We need salvation. But where do we go? Where do we turn for that salvation? What are we hoping in? And what Peter and John are saying. He's talking about this cornerstone, this camp, this cornerstone, this foundation stone. He's saying, what are you resting in? What are you hoping in? What are you placing your bed of eternal life on?

What is your foundation? And his implication is this temple that you see the sacrificial system that you are overseeing is a faulty foundation because its purpose was not actually to bring salvation to you, but it was to point to the one that will. It was a point to the one that will actually forgive your sins and offer the final sacrifice.

Moses will not save you. Moses pointed to a prophet that would come after him. And by the way, Rome, your political ally, whom you accommodated. They will not save you either. See, the Sadducees weren't all that interested in a revolution because they were comfortable. They were powerful at influence. They had money. And if you're resting and your political hopes and the

government, whoever's in power, whoever's in the Oval Office or you're resting in some workspace, religion, you have a faulty foundation, a faulty cornerstone.

What Peter and John are saying is that Jesus has come to build a new temple. And this cornerstone is the most important stone, the most important piece of this foundation. It's the largest. It brought the structure, it brought integrity. It set the direction for the temple. And all other stones had to be cut and fit according to the cornerstone. He says if you want surety, if you want a strong salvation, you got to go to Jesus. This temple is not the answer. Rome is not the answer. Your wealth, your power, your comfort is not the answer. We need to hear the same thing. We need to continue to go back to Christ as our cornerstone, our sure salvation day in and day out sees us to our next ministry principle. Principle number two effective gospel witnesses are bold and faithful to the message, bold and faithful to the message. You cannot accuse Peter and John from watering down their message in front of the Sanhedrin. At the risk of their own life, they knew what happened to Jesus, right? They crucified him. They were willing to sacrifice it all to proclaim what God has called them, to proclaim. Later on, these elders, these leaders will recognize their boldness, their straightforwardness.

See, our job is not to convert anybody. Our job is not to argue somebody into the faith because we cannot. We don't have that power. We're not the Holy Spirit. We do not bring regeneration no matter how hard we try. Our job is to be faithful with the message. We know faith comes by hearing, by hearing by the Word of Christ. We know the power of the gospel is what brings in a dead heart and makes it alive for so our role is just to simply present the gospel. And step back and trust the Lord to work.

The Apostle Paul in Second Corinthians chapter four says this. Therefore, having the ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. It's easy to lose heart in gospel ministry. Is it not? It's difficult work. It's hard work. There's opposition. There's people that reject you. There's people that do not respond favorably.

But he's saying, we have this ministry by the mercy of God. It come to us by grace. We do not lose heart. But we who have renounced grace, renounced disgraceful, unhandled ways. We don't manipulate people, we don't strongarm people. We don't coerce toward the gospel. We refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God's Word. But by open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

That's our job. That's our role to present by open statement the truth of the gospel. Every single one of us can do that. Amen. I've been recently convicted by my friend of mine. He is a pretty prominent salesman and very good at it. He works very, very hard. And he's been fairly successful at it. And if you meet him, it's seemingly all that he wants to talk about. Is the product that he's selling. He has confidence in it. He's very passionate about it, and he'll talk to anybody and everybody about it. But he doesn't coerce you. He doesn't make you feel bad or guilty if you don't want to buy it. He just simply offers it to you and he simply offers it to everybody he meets.

Which has led him to have a lot of successful salesmen, because they see in him a passion and a belief about the product. And that convicts me because here's a man selling earthly, worldly good, which is not bad in of itself and actually offers a benefit to society, but it's temporal. And here I have. The treasure of eternal life that we give away for free. But how often am I as confident as my friend or as passionate my friend?

May we be just as passionate as others are about temporal things, about eternal things. Let's keep reading verse 13.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, they perceived that they were uneducated, common men. They were astonished and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, what shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed. Through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name. So they called them and charged them to not to speak or teach in all in the name of Jesus. 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. But we cannot speak of what we have seen and heard. And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people. For all were praising God for what happened, for the man of whom this sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old.

The Sanhedrin was in a difficult position. Clearly a miracle was performed. A man's life was changed forever for his good. They cannot deny that. Verse 14 it says, but seeing the man was healed, standing beside them had nothing to say in opposition. Say he's there. Exhibit A, he's bearing witness. He's bearing testimony. Couldn't walk now he can. It's not a rumor. We can't shove him in a closet. He's there. And a bunch of people witnessed this event. They were put on the spot. How are they going to respond? What are they going to do? Because they don't want to cause a riot. They don't want to cause further commotion.

And then they make this astonishing statement. They recognize Peter and John made sound theological points. It doesn't mean they agreed with those points, but they were just impressed. They make this statement. They call them uneducated, common men. This doesn't mean that they were illiterate. Or they were somehow dumb in any way. Now what they were recognizing that these men do not have a formal seminary education.

They didn't get their MDiv from the Seminary of Jerusalem and temple administration. They weren't professionals. These are amateurs. And they recognize from then there is a knowledge and a power about them and a conviction about them that is different. And that their education came from Jesus. And they said they recognize that they had been with Jesus. You could not have given these men a higher compliment. In fact, you couldn't give me a higher compliment if you came to me and told me, hey, Stephen, just encouraged by you, it's obvious you've been with Jesus. Me? It would overwhelm me. But these men had been with Jesus. They got their education from him. They learned the scriptures from him. They articulated a boldness from him. And so this leads us to our next ministry of principle. Effective gospel witnesses walk with Jesus. Effective gospel witnesses walk with Jesus. There are people who've been accused of being with Jesus, being with him, filled with the Holy Spirit, knowing God's Word.

See the issue with these men in the Sanhedrin wasn't that they had a seminary education. Seminary educations are good. I went to one. I will tell you, we'd love to have you at a seminary. It's a good seminary, but seminary education is only valuable to the group to the degree that it's anchored to God's Word. If it gets outside of God's Word, it has no value. And praise the Lord that our seminary is anchored to God's Word.

And what these men, what these elders, what these leaders missed, was they strayed from understanding who the Messiah was, what the Word of God was pointing to. You got caught up with other things. And these ordinary, regular people. Or teaching them about God's Word. And what I think about this in our church, how blessed we are. Because every day, every week, I run into people who minister faithfully in this church.

They don't have seminary educations. They don't have Bible degrees. Where there are people who walk with Jesus, there are people who know God's Word. There are people who shepherd. I think about this every time we have a session meeting or a committee meeting that we go to, and one of our lay elders gives the devotion. And I think, how intimidating is that guy to be?

Because we have like 20 pastors on staff, and you got guys like Dr. Doriani who teach in seminary, right, who know the Greek in Hebrew, like probably dream in it. And you got to go open God's word to them. But yet these men faithfully do. And they shepherd us because they walk with Jesus. And I learn so much from them, and so does the rest of the pastoral staff. And there's so many people here, men and women, who faithfully administer God's Word because they walk with Jesus, may be so for us. Verse 15, I oh, wait, I did that. Getting ahead of myself. So they let Peter and John go free, but they charge them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But notice how the apostles respond.

Look at verse 19, But Peter and John answered them, whether is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge. For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. They posed to the Sanhedrin, these leaders a rhetorical question. The question is this who should we listen to? All religious leaders.

Do we listen to God or we listen to man? When is conflict between the two? Who do we listen to?

Now he knows these religious leaders are going to have to answer God, but he knows that they're not going to answer it. But that's their point. They must bear witness because they've been commanded by God, but also compelled by God. They've been compelled by God's grace. Think about where again we said where Peter was last time hiding from a little girl, scared.

That he would end up just like Jesus executed. But what happens to Peter? When Jesus rises from the grave, he meets Jesus, meets Peter on a beach and forgives him, restores him, empowers him and equips him, and says, feed my sheep. You have an important role.

And he is enamored by the love of God.

See the ministry principal. The last one that I want to give you. Effective gospel witnesses are compelled by the love of Christ. Effective gospel witnesses are compelled by the love of Christ. Second Corinthians five says this for the love of Christ controls us, compels us, because we have concluded this, that one has died for all. Therefore all have died, and he died for all, that those who live may no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

So you were commanded to go preach the gospel, but are also compelled, because we have a sure cornerstone, a sure foundation, a sure hope of our eternal life, because Christ has broken into our world and broken into our life, and forgave us of our sin and purchased of eternal life with him in heaven forever. We know where we would be apart from Christ.

But Christ in his mercy for gave us an insight of that love inside of that conviction that we must go on to continue to witness. This week I read the story about this man named some. He was the son of a warlord pirate in Somalia, and he came to Christ, had to flee his family because of severe persecution.

And in so doing, his mother tries to protect him and is killed by his father and his father's men. And he finds himself in the underground church, eventually meets the men who killed his mom, goes up to him and says, I want you to know that I've found forgiveness in Christ. I'm not bitter, not angry because Christ forgave me.

I'm willing to forgive you. And these men were so astonished by this that there is nothing in our religion. That really offers forgiveness. How could you forgive us in this way? He tells them about Jesus and these two men who murdered his mom.

Embrace Christ and take part of the underground church in Somalia. And then one of his jobs in this underground church is to smuggle Bibles in from Kenya. And he does so in a casket of a dead person. This is what he says. While people ordinarily travel on foot, on a donkey or by bus, I'm still riding in caskets.

It's the only way to get Bibles spread around to the saints. I love the irony that caskets for dead people are used by God to bring new life into Somalia. Underground believers, and there are many now, are being transformed into the likeness of our Savior. Through this book. What compels a man to place himself under a dead body, under the stench of the rotting corpse, smuggling Bibles from another country, the risk of his own life so that others may know what compels him.

He knows that Jesus is his true cornerstone, his true foundation, his only hope for eternal life. That even though in this life there's suffering, there's persecution, there's pain, there is an eternal life that awaits us, that is beyond anything that we can imagine. And the people around him need to know, and he's willing to give up everything in the sacrifice, much so that others may know.

And so, as we conclude 2024, we look to 2025. May we be a church, may we be a people who stand upon the firm foundation, the firm cornerstone of Christ, knowing that there is salvation and no one else. And may we be compelled, like Peter and John, like a Psalm. I'm like the others around us to proclaim Christ to a lost and dying world.

Lord, we praise and thank you for your word. We thank you for the book of acts that teaches us so much about gospel ministry, but principally teaches us about Jesus. It says early on that the first book that look Luke wrote was all the things that Jesus began to do and teach. The book of acts is that he continues to do and preach. He's doing that now. May we stand true to him. May we face opposition with courage, knowing that you have the authority and the power to equip us and the work of proclaiming the gospel. May we be people who must share and must witness because of the mercy being given to us. We ask all this in your name.

Amen.