

### Christians: Be Seen and Be Heard

<sup>12</sup> The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ... <sup>17</sup> Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. <sup>18</sup> They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. <sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. <sup>20</sup> "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life."

<sup>21</sup> At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. <sup>22</sup> But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, <sup>23</sup> "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." <sup>24</sup> On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this.

<sup>25</sup> Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." <sup>26</sup> At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

<sup>27</sup> Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup> "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

<sup>29</sup> Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

In St. Peter is the historic Cox House, an old Victorian style home from the nineteenth century. It is a museum now. I remember taking the kids there for a tour. When the tour guide showed us the dining room, he said, "Years ago families would eat with this one rule: Children are to be seen and not heard."

There are those who think this rule should apply to Christians at all times. In this reading from Acts 5 the Jewish leaders outlawed the teaching about Christ. They told them they can be seen, but they can't be heard. I pray we can follow the boldness of the early apostles who obeyed God rather than men so that we are not only seen, but heard loud and clear.

#### *I. The gospel message of Christ faces opposition.*

It is interesting. You can take one hundred people, all with similar backgrounds, preach the message of Christ to them and you will have mixed results. Some believe, others show some interest, still others don't care or became angry. We see a similar reaction in the book of Acts. On Pentecost Peter preached and over three thousand were baptized. As the book of Acts goes on, Luke, the doctor turned historian, tells us that number swelled to over 5,000 men. Finally, Luke couldn't keep count and said that their numbers grew daily. That's one reaction to the message of Christ.

But there were some who pretended to be Christians like Ananias and Sapphira. They wanted to look Christian, but in their hearts they didn't believe. That is another reaction to the message of Christ. We are told that many in Jerusalem respected these Christians, so much so that the guards were afraid to use force to arrest the apostles. They appreciated the kindness and good works of these Christians, but didn't want to hear them explain their faith. That is another reaction to the message of Christ.

Finally, our text reminds us there were those who directly opposed the preaching of Christ. The High Priest was so filled with hatred he couldn't even say the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. If they had their way, Christians would neither be seen nor heard. For now they simply ordered them not to say a word about Christ. That was another reaction to the message of Christ.

This doesn't surprise us. We see the same today. Some believe, thank God. Others will oppose us. So be it. Generally, folks are OK if Christians are around if they don't say anything. That is how the world feels. But how does your Lord feel about this? He tells us to be seen and heard.

#### *II. But speak the whole message of Christ.*

At first our text may not be a greater motivator to be share our faith. Look at the apostles. They obeyed God and they were arrested. No one here wishes to be arrested. But here is the motivation. They persisted. What was so important that God miraculously freed his apostles from prison? What was so important that they risked jail, even death, to preach about Christ? What

possible excuse could there be to flagrantly disobey the authority God established? Listen to what the angel said to them, to **“tell the people the full message of this new life.** That is why. They were no agitators. They had a message that gives new life.

Watch Peter preach the full message. He argued that everyone needed to hear about Christ. He did this by revealing our need for him. That need is sin. Listen to him point out the most obvious sin in the room as he accused them of murder. **The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.** They didn't want to hear that. What sinner does? Peter wasn't being a jerk or condescending. Nor was he merely lashing at those who arrested him. He was explaining why it was so important that he and the others were willing to risk it all to share Christ. The sinner needs Christ. Even the high priest needed him. Our need is so great he and the others would risk death to tell us about him.

The sinner naturally expends a lot of time and energy covering up sins or shifting the blame somewhere else. This is because the sinner is afraid of the truth. As it says in 1 John, **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”** No one wants to admit they are sinners. I don't. You don't. That is why our sins need to be revealed. But this painful admission can lead to the greatest news you will hear. 1 John continues, **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**

Do you see what Peter was doing? Do you see the door he was opening? Yes, they murdered Jesus. But he didn't stay dead. God raised him from the dead and put him at his right hand. This confirms that this Jesus who died on the cross is God himself, the Son of God. Yet, this God so loved us that he became human so he could die for our sins. Peter wasn't pushing them away when he talked about their sins. He wasn't trying to make himself look better by making them look bad. He was calling them back. How? He showed them their sins so they may attach them to Christ. Let him, not yourself, pay for those sins. He did, and now there is complete forgiveness. Over and over again we find the apostles repeating the same message before the world. Most of them were executed for their efforts. Thank God they were not just seen; they were heard worldwide up to this day.

I pray you are seen. I pray that the fruits of your faith are plentiful and are benefitting others. I pray folks respect you. I hope your Christianity is seen and felt by all. Be seen, but also be heard. We know we have obstacles. We know we will experience mixed results which may be discouraging. We know some may be angry with us, even those close to us. The biggest obstacle for many of us is our own fear. We are probably telling ourselves to be seen but not heard. It is easy to hide and say nothing. But you know this message gives eternal life. Don't make it harder than it is. You don't need a 39 step evangelism outline. You don't have to be smart or skilled. Peter was not an educated man. It is better you don't use a script. Speak from the heart. Tell them what Christ means to you. Tell them how forgiveness and this message of a new life helps you cope day by day. In fact, this may be the only reason you get through the day. Tell them what it means to have heaven guaranteed all because God came and carried off the guilt of our sin.

And the apostles are there to help you. **We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.** Don't try to convince them yourselves. Let the apostles testify. You do that when you share a key passage or story or chapter.

And there is one more witness, God the Holy Spirit. Imagine stepping into your car or truck. You turn the key, move a lever, step on a pedal and watch how several tons of steel, glass and rubber glides smoothly down the street, powered not by you, but by the mechanical horses under the hood. You can't convince anyone to believe this. No one can. Let the Holy Spirit do it. Turn the key. Let his power move hearts as you share the Word.

It is rude to start screaming in a crowded movie theater. People would become easily annoyed, mad or violent if you do. But if there was a fire and you were showing them the exit, that's a different story. Christians, do what the Scripture says, be kind and compassionate in words and actions. Be seen, but also be heard. We have the message given to the apostles. It gives life to you. Let it give life to others. Amen.