



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts: 4:1-22

Acts

"The Gathering Storm"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in Acts 4 this morning and we'll look at verses 1 through 22. We actually come into the middle of a scene which began in chapter 3. Peter has healed a man in the temple. He's been God's agent in healing a man in the temple, he's preached a sermon, and now we read a large crowd, by the way, has gathered around to hear him preach, and we read in verse 1:

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the council, they began to confer with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness, your grace, your mercy to us. We thank you, Father, for this day in which we can gather and read your Word publically as we have done. What a blessing and a privilege that is to have in our possession the inerrant Word of God and read it, and then to spend some time contemplating its meaning. And we pray that as we do that, Father, you would bless us, instruct us, build us up in the faith. Your Word is inerrant, but the thoughts and the comments that we might make upon it are not, and so we seek your guidance, we seek your instruction through the Holy Spirit with whom you have blessed us.

We thank you so much for the gift of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, who protects us and guides us and teaches us, and we pray for that ministry in a special way this morning that we might be built up in the faith and equipped for the week to come; that we might go forth from this place into the world ready, eager, and prepared to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those whom we meet. That's our mission, Father. We are reminded of that in a very stirring way in this event, in the life of the church, and in the lives of Peter and John; and we pray that you would teach us much

from them, and about your work: your work of grace and power and mercy. And so we pray that this would be a very fruitful time for us; that you bless us.

We pray for our lives not only spiritually, but physically. You've made us not only spiritual beings, eternal beings, but you've made us people with physical bodies and time, and with all of the difficulties that come in a fallen world, and changing circumstances of life. We must always look to you to bless in the material things of life, as well as the spiritual. And we pray, Lord, for those who are in particular need.

We pray for the sick. We pray that you'd give healing, that you'd give encouragement. We pray for all who might be discouraged for one reason or another. Difficulties of life weigh upon us and we become weighed down by them, and we pray that those who are discouraged might be lifted up, and that you might do that with us here, if that be the case, through the ministry of your Word. We pray that you'd bless us.

Thank you for the gifts that you've given us, the blessings that you bless us with every day. Every breath of life that we take, every beat of our heart is a gift from you. We live and we move and we have our existence in you. That's true of all men, believer and unbeliever alike. We receive much. We thank you for it, Father. We pray that you'd make us increasingly thankful and pray that you'd bless us in the time that we have this morning to study and to worship you. May it be pleasing to you.

Bless us again this evening as we return to this place to celebrate the Lord's Supper to reflect upon him and his death for us, the sacrifice that he made, saves sinners eternally, and know that he's coming back. And in the same way in which he left, he will return to this world, and we look forward to that day. Bless us as we sing our final hymn. May it prepare our hearts for our study together we pray, in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] After the second World War, Winston Churchill wrote a six-volume history of it. The first volume is entitled *The Gathering Storm*. It covers the years 1919 to 1940 and recounts the political events that led up to the War that he felt could have been avoided, "if," in his words, "the English-speaking people had been wise."

Many conflicts in life can be avoided if we will be wise and not give the enemy an opportunity. That's true spiritually. But not all conflicts are avoidable. Some are necessary, and spiritual conflicts are inevitable. The Lord warned his disciples that they would have them. In Mark 13, he told them that they would be

hated by all on account of his name, they would be delivered up to the courts and beaten.

In John 15, he said, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." But right after Pentecost, nothing suggested any kind of hostility on the horizon; just the opposite. The church in Jerusalem enjoyed peace and growth. The first chapters of Acts give what John Stott called an idyllic picture. The church was worshipping, and learning, and enjoying favor with all men. But when we come to Acts 4, things change. We see signs of the gathering storm that cannot be avoided. It will break in a few chapters later in violence that will end the peace and scatter the church.

Chapter 4 picks up with Peter and John in the temple. Peter has healed a lame man and given a sermon. It was late in the afternoon a large crowd had gathered around the three men and was listening to Peter proclaim the cross, and the resurrection, and call for repentance and faith. Word got back to the authorities that Peter was preaching and drawing a crowd. The Sadducees were particularly disturbed by what he was saying about the resurrection, and so they sent the temple police to arrest them.

Sadducees, you will remember, were the ruling class in Jerusalem. The aristocrats, they were priests, but wealthy men who were very secular in their outlook. They cooperated with the Roman authorities to maintain the status quo. They had plotted the crucifixion because they were afraid Christ's popularity would lead to a revolt against Rome and overturn all that they had. They were pragmatic men; they were worldly men, what we would call today "liberal theologians."

We learn later on in the book of Acts 23:8 the theology of these men, these Sadducees. They didn't believe in the supernatural; they didn't believe in angels; they didn't believe in the resurrection. So when they heard that Peter and John were in the temple teaching that Christ had been raised from the dead, Luke writes: "They were greatly disturbed." And challenge was to their authority in making that statement, and really charged them with guilt in the Lord's death and probably unsettled their consciences; because if it was true that Jesus Christ was alive, that he had been raised from the dead, then they were under judgment. And so they wanted to shut these men up and sent the temple guards to do that, to arrest them and bring them before the Sanhedrin for a formal inquest.

They did that, but not before a large number of people had believed, making the church to number about 5,000 men. Now if we take that strictly, 5,000 men – not including women; not including children – then the church has grown in a matter of days or weeks to 10,000 or more people. That shows the power of God's Word. It is like a sword. It divides men, it causes a response, it brings people to faith, or it provokes persecution. But the persecutors cannot hinder its work.

There have been many bloody attempts to do that. The church has undergone great persecution, fire and sword; but in the end, it has endured, and even grown stronger. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." And, here, he allowed the gates of Hades to come against the apostles and stop Peter's sermon, but only after it was finished and a large number of people had believed. The providence of God is perfect and the timing was perfect. He ended one sermon, and now he's opened the door for another sermon that will take place before an audience that would not come near Peter. But they've unwittingly invited a sermon upon themselves.

It was already evening. There was no time to hold an inquiry into the apostle's conduct, and so they, along with the former lame man, were thrown in jail for the night. The next morning, the Sanhedrin assembled for a formal investigation. This was the Supreme Court of the land. It was composed of 71 members who were presided over by the high priest; and Luke lists them, lists these members in verses 5 and 6 as rulers and elders and scribes, along with Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and all who were of high priestly decent.

Now we're familiar with some of them, particularly Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas. Caiaphas was legally the high priest, but the real power behind the throne was Annas. He had been the former high priest until the Romans had deposed him. But he remained the chief priest in popular opinion, and so Luke mentions him first with that title. Before this impressive array of men that Peter and John were made to stand.

Luke says, "In the center," because the Sanhedrin met in a semicircle, and so they're brought before these men. These same men thought that they had rid themselves of Jesus, only to find two of his disciples carrying on his message and miracles, and the city being converted. And so they put the question to Peter and John, "By what power or in what name have you done this?" In other words, "In

whose authority did they act?" They certainly didn't act in the authority of the Sanhedrin, so they are being told to justify their actions.

It was an intimidating situation. Peter and John were certainly aware that it was in that same hall before that same court that Jesus had been condemned to death. These were men of great authority. They knew that their lives hung in the balance as they stood there. It was enough to make cowards of most men, but not these men. They had been prepared by the Lord. He had warned them of coming persecution of being delivered to the court, and he had encouraged them not to worry about what they would say in that hour. "The Holy Spirit," he said, "would be with them, and he would give them the words that they were to speak." And so they were prepared for the worst, but armed with the promise of God's faithfulness.

This was his fight not theirs, and he always proves faithful, and he would prove faithful to these men. Peter would not be disappointed. He spoke and gave a clear bold explanation of what had happened and the authority for the miracle. Luke records his reply in verses 8 through 12. Begins with the source of his statement, the source of his words, verse 8: Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people." He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

We find that phrase frequently in the book of Acts, and might wonder why it is that the apostles were filled with the Spirit when on the day of Pentecost they had been baptized with the Spirit. What is the difference between them? It's an important question because the two are different experiences, different from one another. Filling refers essentially to endowment with spiritual power for special tasks. It refers specifically to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul explains it with an analogy in Ephesians 5:18. He writes: "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit." Wine controls the thoughts and actions of people who are filled with it. It is a powerful substance for dissipation and abuse. The Holy Spirit though also exerts power, but for good, for enablement and edification. And that's what the filling describes; his control over our thoughts and actions which make us useful. It doesn't mean that a person who's filled with the Spirit is filled up with more of the Spirit than he or she has at the moment of faith, but rather that the influence fills the life at a particular moment on a particular occasion. It is a work of the Spirit that is usually found in the context of the particular task of preaching the Word of God or performing a miracle.

Baptism with the Spirit is the work of Christ, when he baptizes believers into his body, makes us members of the church, putting us in the Holy Spirit and putting the Holy Spirit in us. We are sealed with the Spirit at the moment of faith Paul says in Ephesians 1:13 and made to drink of one's spirit, as he puts it in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Baptism with the Holy Spirit happens only once. It is introductory; it brings us into the body of Christ at the moment of faith; it is permanent; it can never be repeated. We can never be taken out of the body of Christ and so it will never be repeated again as an experience.

Filling with the Spirit, being controlled by the Spirit can occur frequently, and we find it frequently occurring in the book of Acts, and it was the reason that Peter in this intimidating situation, this coward-making kind of situation, that he was able to speak with impressive courage and power and clarity. He respectfully addressed the court and then he replied to their question about the cause of the man's cure: "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands here before you in good health."

The statement gives only a small defense of their actions asking, in effect, "Are we on trial today for doing something good, a benefit done to a sick man?" In other words, "Is healing the lame a crime?" That was a potent defense, but he says it almost in passing in order to come to the central point which is not a defense of himself or John, but Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected.

One evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is a clear testimony to Jesus Christ. When people are filled with the Spirit, they speak of Christ because that is the Holy Spirit's ministry. It is to glorify Christ. Jesus said that; told that to his disciples in John 16:14. He said, "He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you."

Whenever you see a ministry that puts great emphasis upon the Holy Spirit and makes him the focus of the ministry and the things that they claim the Holy Spirit is doing, you can be sure that's not a spirit-filled, spirit-guided ministry. The Holy Spirit doesn't call attention to himself, but to Christ, and that is what Peter did. He didn't waste words, he answered the question and made it an opportunity to preach the

gospel to his judges, and in effect, put them on trial. "A man was cured because of Jesus Christ, whom you crucified," he said, "and whom God raised from the dead."

That took courage. But it was necessary that before giving the gospel in verse 12, he first exposed their guilt and their need of salvation. They crucified the one whom God raised. He vindicated the one they had condemned which proves that Christ is righteous, that he is God's son, that he is alive today.

Peter backed up his statement with a well-known text from the Old Testament, Psalm 118:22. "He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief cornerstone." The builders of the psalm are the rulers of the nation, the men to whom Peter was speaking. They were like workers who failed to see the perfection of a stone, threw it away, only to see it become the main stone in the foundation.

There was a large stone in Florence, a great block of marble that had been worked on by various artists, but was rejected by all of them because it was considered worthless, it was considered flawed marble; and for years, it lay on a rubbish heap. But Michelangelo, who had a genius for seeing beauty, saw something that no one else did, and he bought the block, brought it to his studio; and out of it, he carved his masterpiece, the statue of David.

The builders of the nation were like those artists of Florence. They saw nothing in Christ of value, just a carpenter from Nazareth. They thought him a worthless man, but were unable to see in him the son of David, and so rejected him. God reversed their judgment. He raised him from the dead and vindicated him, making him the Chief Cornerstone of his great work, the church, the people of God. In spite of man's opposition, the Lord always accomplishes his purpose. God cannot be frustrated. His hand cannot be turned back. He makes the wrath of man to praise him.

A nation's rejection of Christ was the very means by which he accomplished salvation and was made the Chief Cornerstone. And just as everything in an ancient building took its shape from the cornerstone of the foundation, so too all of God's work takes its shape and meaning from Christ. We only have a place in God's plan of salvation, we only have a portion in his inheritance, a place in his building, the church, as we line up with Christ and are right with him.



And that brings Peter to the gospel in verse 12, "Christ is the chief cornerstone, and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." And what Peter was saying to those men is, "You must be saved."

It was a bold statement. He was telling the leaders of the nation, men of great authority – priests, those who made the sacrifices daily in the temple and in the great days of the feasts of the year; and the scribes, men who were scholars in their field – telling them that they were lost and they could only be saved by the one whom they had rejected. It was a dangerous message to give, but it was the one those men needed to hear, and it is the message that needs to be heard today in our age of pluralism.

There are many ways of religion, but only one way of life, and that is the crucified living Savior, Jesus Christ. That's what Peter said. "There is salvation in no one else." Can't get any plainer than that. Peter's words are the compliment of our Lord's statement in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me."

Christianity allows for no other view, no other way than Christ alone. It tolerates no other gospel. It is the narrow truth of the straight and narrow way. The world hates that.

Nothing is more offensive to the natural man than the idea that he cannot save himself, that he is a sinner, and that his way is a way not good enough for God. His best falls far short of what God requires. What the nonbelieving world want to hear is that there are many ways to God, that there is salvation without faith; and there are many theologians today who teach just that. That was affirmed in the Second Vatican Council that, "People can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ, yet, sincerely seek God."

The problem is the Bible makes it very clear, "No man seeks after God; no, not one." There's none righteous; there's none who does good. They've all turned aside and gone their own way. That's the natural man, that's universally the case, and what this document says is there's such a thing as salvation by sincerity. For many today love rather than faith is the condition for salvation and justification.

But what does the Bible say? That's our standard; that's the source of truth; that's the light on this subject. What does the Bible say?

Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." Galatians 3:22, " But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." Promises given by faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe.

John 8:24, Jesus said to the Pharisees, " I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he," that I am the Son of God, Very God of Very God, the Savior of the World, "unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins."

Faith alone in Christ alone is the only way of salvation. The Bible is clear; the choice is simple: Christ or hell. Now that's narrow, and it is intolerant. Not bigoted, but exclusive.

There is only one way, a narrow way, but a way broad enough for all believers; and it is our mission to proclaim that message. It is a mission and a message for a lost and needy world, it is the message of life for the dead, and we are to proclaim it without compromise. It's the greatest message in the world, and the glory of it, the power of it is illustrated in the one standing in front of the Sanhedrin; the cripple cured after some 40 years of lameness, born in that condition, yet walking and leaping and praising God. It was a living parable of what Christ does for sinners.

Saving health is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gives life. He delivers from bondage; from guilt, the guilt of sin; and the judgment that's due to sin – the judgment to come. He's the deliverer of all of that. But there's no deliverance apart from faith in Christ. And if those rulers persisted in their resistance, they would die in their sins. And so the course of action for them was clear to repent and turn to Christ in faith. It was fearlessly said. And when Peter was done, the ruler sat in stunned silence.

They knew that the two men were, as Luke puts it, uneducated and untrained – meaning they hadn't received formal training in the rabbinical schools. They could read and write and they knew much from the synagogue, they learned a great deal there, but they hadn't gone through the university that was acceptable to these men. They didn't have the right degrees. But they spoke with such freedom and boldness that the men of the Sanhedrin were amazed and wondered how mere laymen could maintain a theological discussion so ably. An answer to their question didn't escape them for long when they began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. He, too, had not sat at the feet of any great rabbi, and yet, he taught them with authority that

the rabbis didn't have, and with skill that couldn't be matched in any debate over the Bible.

The Jews were astonished by him. And in John 17:15 said, "How has this man become learned having never been educated?" No one knew the Scriptures or had the ability to handle them like Christ did, and now these men of the Sanhedrin could see the same skill in his two disciples. That's what happens when people become companions of Christ. They become like him.

Alexander MacLaren said that, "The soul in habitual contact with Jesus acquires his sweetness, just as garments laid away in a drawer with some perfume absorb the fragrance of it."

The apostles were able to respond to opposition the way they did like Christ had done because they walked with Christ, they knew him; they fellowshiped with him. And that is true for us as well. As we abide in him and he abides in us, we become like him, well-prepared for the challenges of life. And so we're to draw near to him. We do that through the study of God's Word. The Bible promises to make us wiser than our enemies if we give careful attention to it.

There are a number of examples of that, but one that stands out in my mind is from the life of Abraham Kuyper who was a brilliant theologian of the 19th and early 20th centuries. He's a man of great intelligence; perhaps genius and prodigious activity. He established a major university in Amsterdam and served as Prime Minister of Holland. But one of the greatest influences on his life occurred early when he was a young preacher in a rural Dutch town. He was liberal in his theology. He attended the University of Leiden and done exceptionally well, and come out with a false theology, a liberal theology. But in this first church in which he ministered, he was impressed with the Calvinistic piety of the villagers; and impressed with one person in particular, a simple peasant woman who influenced him to orthodoxy because of her knowledge of Scripture and her courage to challenge his faith; and she repeatedly did that. And it affected that man greatly who went on to affect many, many others, and is still having an affect today.

The Word of God will make us wiser than our enemies, and useful; very useful. But Christlikeness comes not only with study, but also with consistent prayer, conversing with God, drawing near to the throne of grace with praise and thanksgiving and petitions for ourselves and for other, bearing one another's burdens

at the throne of grace. It involves a life of obedience. It's not enough to read the Word of God and then turn away like someone who looks in a mirror and then walks away and forgets what he or she saw. We are to obey the things that we study and read, and we're to be involved in service, service of the Lord and being of help to those around us, fellowshiping with his people. All of this is part of what is involved in walking with the Lord. But first and foremost, Christlikeness is the result of simply knowing him and growing in that relationship with him.

I came across a quote from the British theologian P.T. Forsyth that I think is appropriate. He wrote, "We shall never worship right nor serve right till we are more engrossed with our God than even with our worship, with his reality than our piety, with his cross than our service."

The brethren who love best and the love that loves longest are made by the gospel. Love for the brethren, concern for the world, sacrificial service arise naturally from an understanding of grace, a genuine love for Jesus Christ, from a relationship with him that is the result of the gospel, of knowing it and believing it, trusting in him alone and growing in that relationship.

Peter and John had that. They walked with Christ. They had a real relationship with him and so were able to stand before their judges as the Lord had done with control and courage. The Sanhedrin didn't know how to respond to them. A miracle had obviously occurred. It had been done in the name of Jesus Christ; they couldn't deny it; all of Jerusalem knew about it. But neither did they make an attempt to disprove the apostle's claim to the resurrection.

This would have been an excellent opportunity had they been able to do so to produce the body our Lord if they had that, or knew where it was, or produced witnesses that could give testimony that the resurrection had never happened, that it was a hoax. Had they been able to do that, that would have solved all their problems and ended completely this movement that so threatened them. They were not able to do that. They could not produce any evidence contrary to the resurrection; they did not attempt to do so. That's the evidence that they had; no evidence against it at all. They didn't contradict the testimony of Peter and John, but neither were they willing to acknowledge the Lord's resurrection or his authority and submit to him.

Now that is a great testimony too, evidence of the hardness of the heart of the natural man. They don't dispute the miracle. A miracle has occurred. They

recognize, "Well, a miracle has occurred," everybody knows about it. Does that lead them to faith? It causes them to become more entrenched in their own belief and more determined to fight against the truth, because that's the way the natural man responds to the truth. He doesn't like what he hears, can't deny the truth of it, so he seeks to shut it up because he will not turn apart from the irresistible powerful grace of God. So that's what they try to do.

What they tried to do was control the apostles and stop their influence by imposing a ban on their preaching. They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Well, if they thought a show of power would make cowards of the apostles, they were quickly disappointed. Verse 19: But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." And in their statement, they give us a fundamental principle of Christian behavior: "We are people under authority. We must obey that authority."

The state is an authority and we must obey the laws of the state. It has been appointed by God, ordained by God. Paul states that in Romans 13:1, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities," he said. But when the authority of the state conflicts with the authority of God; when the authority of the boss at work conflicts with God's Word, we must obey God. That is where the apostles drew their line in the sand. They would be good citizens.

All of us are to be good citizens. We're to be people that keep the laws of the land, obey them more conscientiously than others do. We are to be people who help in the things of this world in the society around us. We should contribute to it. We are to be good citizens. They would be good citizens, but they would not compromise their faith. Well, helpless to do anything about it, afraid of a protest by the people, the judges could only threaten the apostles and then let them go. They did that; and with that, the first confrontation with the rulers of this world ended.

But the spiritual skies over Jerusalem were now beginning to darken. The storm was gathering. It always does when the Word of God is preached, or the gospel is given. It is a sword that divides men. Paul writes of this in various places, but he makes it very clear and states it clearly in 2 Corinthians 2 where he states that, "The gospel and the man who preaches the gospel is to, one, an aroma from death to death,

and to another, an aroma from life to life." It's what the gospel produces; and that's what we're to produce when we proclaim the truth.

That's our task. It's a huge task. It concerns the eternal souls of men and women, and that fact moved Paul to ask, "Who is adequate for these things? Who is competent for such a work as that?" The answer is, Paul was.

We are, who have the Word of God and proclaim it purely, correctly, and from a pure heart, because the Word of God, the truth of God is living and active. It is a unique book, it is a powerful message, and we are not alone in giving that message or in that mission of ourselves. We are, of course, not fit for it. We are not adequate for it. But we are never simply of ourselves when we're walking by faith, walking by the Spirit. "Our adequacy is from God," Paul adds. And the Lord has put us on that mission. It's his mission and he's always with us in it.

He demonstrated that before the Sanhedrin. Peter was filled with the Spirit, controlled and enabled for the great task that was given to him. It was not a task that he invited on himself. He did not come up with this keen idea to go to the Sanhedrin that morning and preach the gospel to those men. God opened the door. Peter and John were simply walking by faith as they entered that temple responding to the circumstances as godly men would, and doors opened, and one opportunity to preach opened the door for another opportunity to preach to a completely different audience, and with a completely different response.

But it's as we follow our Lord, as we walk by the Spirit, controlled by him, we brought to circumstances that may be well beyond us in our natural ability, but never, never beyond our Lord's capacity and strength and wisdom. And he proved that here; and he will do that, which he did for them, for us as we walk by the Spirit and live by faith. And so we are to go out into the world and we are to carry out that mission. We are to proclaim that message; that's our task.

Donald Bloesch, a Presbyterian theologian wrote that, "The church of Jesus Christ is a beachhead of light on enemy-occupied territory." That's what we are. That's the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to hold the ground that we've been given and to penetrate into that enemy-occupied territory with the light of the gospel. Our mission is not to save society. Our mission is not to build the kingdom of God on earth.

We sang this morning, "With deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes." No, it doesn't. We're to be engaged in deeds of love and mercy, and people see the nature of the kingdom of God in that. But the kingdom of God will come when Christ returns, and it will come with a sword; come on a white horse, leading the hosts of heaven; and he will slay the wicked and he will establish his kingdom. But that's what he will do; that's not our mission.

Our mission is to be his witnesses in this world; to be faithful to his truth and proclaim it to a lost world, to a hostile world, and know that God will bless his Word. He had done it from the beginning. He's done it from the day of Pentecost. He's doing it today. He will continue to do it. The gates of Hades will not overpower the church.

Well, our mission is a great one and our message is a wonderful one. It's the message of forgiveness and eternal life. Do you have that? Do you have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal? You do if you have believed in Jesus Christ as God's son and the sacrifice for our sins.

If you've trusted in him, your sins have all been forgiven. They have been removed as far as the east is from the west. Your guilt has been washed out completely. You are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and you are absolutely acceptable to God. At the moment of faith, you are completely accepted by him. There's nothing left for you to do to gain a little bit more of his acceptance. It is absolute and complete at the moment of faith; and that for sinners.

We're not perfect people. We must still be sanctified, and the Spirit of God is doing that in his ongoing work within us. But in terms of being accepted by God, we are absolutely and completely accepted by him. But if you are here without Christ, if you have not believed in him and you are clothed in the filthy rags of your own righteousness – and it is absolutely and completely unacceptable to God, and you will die in your sins unless you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

May God help you to do that, to trust in him. And in trusting in him, to enter into life everlasting, and to holiness, and joy unspeakable. And may God help all of us who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ to rejoice in what we have, and to live like these apostles did with boldness and courage, and with the clear witness, the message of life in Christ. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for a great example that you've given us in these two men, Peter and John, and we admire the courage with which they stood before such opposition. And, yet, what we admire in them is what you did in them. The work of the Spirit of God who dwells within each and every one of us who have believed in Jesus Christ just as fully as he dwelt in Peter, and John, and the other apostles. We are adequately equipped for the work that you have given us.

It is a great work. May we engage in it. May we eagerly be men and women who witness for your Son, and give the gospel to those around us. And if there be any attending this morning who do not know him, disturb them, Father. Make them disturbed by the message of judgment to come. Bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ we pray. In Christ's name. Amen.