



Pointing People to Christ 5

Expecting Opposition

Pastor Mike Fabarez

I was asked recently if growing up I ever played on any sports teams. "Have you ever played on any sports teams?" I felt like they were doubting my masculinity with that question. So I was careful in my answer not to lead with my competitions in the chess club or the dominant period of my high school career competing as a part of the orchestra. So I tried to locate in my mind those periods of times, because I knew my inquisitor was trying to ask about like football and basketball and those kinds of things. So I remembered that and I did compete on some of those levels, so I was able to answer with a very manly and forceful retort. "Well, of course, I played on sports teams," I said. But I do remember both and they were very different. I remember the difference between a physical competition and a cognitive competition. I knew what it was to kind of sit across from an opponent, an adversary at a chess match, and I knew what it was like to stare down my opponent in a wrestling arena and they were two very different things. Right? I knew the physical taxing kind of competition you're going to have, the kind of battle that is going to ensue when you are there on the wrestling mat. I knew what it was to strategize over, you know, a chessboard in trying to outwit your opponent. The one I would come home, you know, bloodied and bruised. I mean, I was the poster child for Proverbs 30:33, "The pressing of the nose brings forth blood." I mean, my nose should be right next to that verse. I bled almost every match. So I would come home bloodied and bruised. It looked terrible. Then I would come home like mentally battered when I was trying to figure out how they beat me in six moves on the chessboard. So I had those experiences of knowing what this thing was like and I knew the difference. I didn't go to a chess match thinking I was going to come home battered and bruised. I kept those two different. My expectations were very different going into each of those.

That was until I read a Web site this week that did nothing but chronicle stories of people who were in chess matches and ended up getting in some kind of physical altercation. It's out there. This one had page after page. I scroll forever reading these stories about people who were there playing chess and then all of the sudden they started beating each other. And, you know, there were several times I wanted to beat someone at a chess match physically, but I refrained and I never did it. Here were these people that not only were throwing bottles at each other and hitting each other. They had stories like this Pennsylvania story in 2003. A man pulls out a knife during a match and actually physically stabbed his opponent during a match of chess. A 55-year-old man in England, the article said he'd had enough in the middle of this. He pulls out a gun and shoots his opponent, kills him playing chess. I mean, there's a guy who takes his, you know, his board games seriously right there. They're just killing people over this board game. It was an amazing thing. Matter of fact, I read so much of this that, actually, I'm a little leery, if you want to ask me to play chess now. I'm going to take some precautions. I'll be packing when we go to play chess because there's, you know, there is that sense in which some people will respond with a disproportional response because they're frustrated, they're annoyed, they're angered over the fact that they might feel like they're losing.



We got to be ready for a disproportional response. You may be going to engage in a battle of wits, but some people will respond, not in kind, they will do things that will actually hurt you in other ways, which is a great principle for us to learn as Christians. The people in Acts were learning that in a way that I think all of us need to learn it, even though we may not be seeing ourselves in the pages of the book of Acts like, hey, we're not going to jail for our faith. We're not, you know, we're not being killed, we're not being beheaded for our faith, at least not in our culture right now in this little corner of the world. But it is happening and it has happened and it started in the book of Acts, Acts Chapter 4 of the first recorded outbreak of persecution in the Church. And here's the thing, you may go in trying to battle in the arena of ideas, which is, of course, what we've been learning in this series. We're sixteen weeks into the book of Acts and we keep learning that it is our responsibility, much like every Christian in the early Church, to share the gospel, the good news. The problem is you share that good news and you get the kind of pushback that is really a disproportional response. I mean, we're trying to share good things and here come these people with their response to that that is actually painful. I mean, it goes often beyond, you know, slander and exclusion. We know our brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world, whether it be in North Africa or Southeast Asia or in the Middle East, who are suffering at the hands of torturers because of the fact that they want to hold out the word of life to people.

See, the battle of ideas, we need to learn in our world, people hold tenaciously to their own ideas and the early Church learned that here in Acts Chapter 4. This all is connected, of course, to Acts Chapter 3 and if you've been with us we've seen that Peter is preaching in Acts Chapter 3 and then we get this turn in Acts Chapter 4 verse 1, where all the sudden we see the response of the leaders. We've seen this great expression of the truth of the gospel in Acts Chapter 3 calling people to see themselves for who they are before God. They've got a problem, Christ has solved it, and the generous offer here of forgiveness is laid before them. Now all of the sudden a response you wouldn't expect and yet we should expect it, because Jesus told us to expect it, here we have people pushing back and pushing back hard and putting Peter in jail.

I'd like for you to turn to this passage, if you haven't already turned there, and I want to find ourselves in this text. I'd love to get through the whole chapter but, of course, I can't, there's too much here for us to deal with in one morning. So I want you to just look at the context of this, which is the first four verses. It's an interesting juxtaposition of things between here's what they were saying, here's how they responded and then here's how other people responded. I mean, there's the basics of what we're set up with. Then they get thrown in jail, as we'll see in verse 3, and we see Peter's response. We'll get to that, Lord willing, next week. The response is, it's telling, it's instructive. But today, if we can just get used to the fact that there is a battle involved.

Now, again, you're going to yawn your way through this sermon if you are not engaged in opening your mouth about the gospel. So I'm sorry in that regard, if you think, well, this doesn't apply to me. Matter of fact, anytime I talk about pushback from the culture or pushback from non-Christians, I get some people who are bold enough at the door or throughout the week to tell me, "Well, you know, you're always talking about that pushback. I don't have any of that pushback." I'm telling you this, if you don't, then there's a problem. There's a problem not only in choosing to live godly as a contrast and your life being a conviction, but when you open your mouth as an ambassador. It's true that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be

persecuted. The persecution may be different now than it is in some places around the world. It may be different now than it was in Church history in some places. But we've got to realize we are going to encounter this if we are faithful to do what this book has been calling us to do. By extension, by example, we are to do what the early Church did, to share the message of repentance to a world that desperately needs it.

Here's the response. Look at verse 1 Acts Chapter 4. Let me read these first four verses for you from the English Standard Version. It begins this way. "And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them." Remember, Peter is in the shadow there of Solomon's colonnade and you've got all these people in this big, wide-open space. Even if you go there today, the Dome of the Rock Mosque, it's not a mosque, it's a shrine there on the Temple Mount, you'll see the same footprint. There are lots of people who can be there. Peter is raising his voice, lifting up his voice, and he's preaching to them. So, of course, the crowd has gathered and now because of that, it started with a miracle there of this paraplegic who is healed in the first few verses of Acts 3, now everyone hears the message of Christ being the reason for this healing and the message of the gospel and Christ rising from the dead and all the things we've studied.

Now the leaders come, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees, they come upon them and, look at this, verse 2, if you really can't identify with having your head chopped off this week because you share the gospel or being incarcerated because you're representing Christ, surely you can identify with these words. Verse 2, "Greatly annoyed." Right? These people are "greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." Our hope of a future. Now, if you're a Sunday school grad, you know the Sadducees did not believe in the afterlife and the resurrection. They really represent liberal Christianity in our day. I mean, they analogized that. They are the people who thought, "Well, you know, there's a little God that needs to be in your life, that will kind of direct us here." And they were all about power and structures and institutions, and they weren't really about the truth of God's Word. They had a form of it, but they denied the power of it. Particularly the power of the resurrection and life after death. That we need to be ready to stand before a tribunal, a throne of God. They certainly didn't like this and it's kind of telling to see in this text the connection between those who are leading this opposition to a particular aspect of the preaching, which is, you know what? This is about the next life, not about this one.

So with the power that they had as the priest, and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees, they, verse 3, "They arrested them and they put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening." Now, all of that is a negative response. I hate to say it, but that's the gist of what we need to talk about this morning. But good news, verse 4, contrasting conjunction. "But," here it comes, "many of those who heard the word," here's the positive response, "they believe," they trusted it, they took it, they believed it, they put their confidence in it, "and the number of the men came to be about 5,000." That's just counting the men in the group. This a big crowd. They've gone from 3,000 in Chapter 2. Now we're up to 5,000 men here in Chapter 4. This group is growing and yet it's not growing without opposition.



God wants our church to grow. God wants Christianity to grow. God wants to establish his Church and not have the gates of hell prevail against it. We want to plant churches, we want to see more people saved, we want to infiltrate our communities with the gospel. But here's the thing, it's not going to come without opposition. So we ought to be ready for that. Because it's really not just a human battle, it's not just a battle of ideas, it's a spiritual battle. I'd like us to note that just by looking at the first two verses, when the good news is met with annoyance. That doesn't seem to make sense. Why would good news that I'm offering to you that you can be forgiven, be right with God, why would that be met with annoyance?

Let's talk about the spiritual battle. Number one if you're taking notes, and I wish that you would, jot this down. Number one, we need to "Understand Our Spiritual Battle." Our spiritual battle is one that we should clearly understand. But I guess before I even get to the supernatural part of this, the spiritual part of this, I just want to talk about what I opened up with and that is when you try to change someone's ideas, if they hold tenaciously to those ideas, there's going to be a natural annoyance. There's going to be annoyance that you can explain just humanly. No one likes to be told they're wrong. The gospel is proclaiming things that clearly are saying your view of God is not right and here's why. This is as relevant as today's conversations with non-Christians. That is that I think I'm okay with God. Right? Non-Christians think that: "I'm okay with God." And if you look back at where we've been in Chapter 2, the sermon that Peter preached in Chapter 3, the sermon that Peter preached, he keeps saying things are messed up. This is a crooked generation. You guys killed Christ. Things are not okay with you and God.

Ask the average non-Christian if he's OK with God. "Yeah, of course, sure, fine. Things are good." Are you going to go to heaven when you die? "Yeah. Hope so. I think so." Why? "Because I'm a good person." Right? Those pictures of the kind of the pre-supposed ideas about God, we're coming on the scene and saying, "Hey, no, no, no, no. Wait a minute. All fall short of the glory of God. You need to know that you're a sinner. You need to know that there is something to," I mean, just to get to the punchline of both the sermon in Acts 2 verse 38, "repent," and this sermon that we just dealt with in Chapter 3 verse 19, repent, repent, repent. Which means you're going the wrong way. You got the wrong ideas. You're committed to the wrong things. Your priorities are wrong. You go tell people that they're wrong, you're going to have a battle on your hands. Right? There's no doubt about that.

But now what we're saying is that your tenaciously held views of yourself and of God and of salvation, they're really not just a natural response, I'm trying to tell you it is a spiritual battle. It is a supernatural response that we have and that we have to contend with. Jot this reference down, I won't make you turn there because most of you know it by heart. It's found in Ephesians Chapter 6, verse 12. And you say, "I don't know if I know that." You do know that. Let me quote it for you. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood." Now, here's the thing, Peter is dealing with flesh and blood. They're listed here. Priest. Those are physical flesh and blood people. The captain of the temple and the Sadducees. He could look in their brown eyes, see their beards and go, these are people.

But the response to him sharing good news that you can be forgiven with great annoyance. We could say, well, yeah, the message it's just naturally offensive in the sense that it's telling people



they're wrong and that Christ is the answer, so whatever answer they had wasn't right. I can understand that. But it's more than that. The disproportional response. It's not as though in this passage they were greatly annoyed so they debated with them. No, they're greatly annoyed so they arrested them. I mean, they're going to beat them later in this chapter. They're going to physically harm them. Now, think about that. This is a disproportional response. Why the fuel on the fire? Well, here's why. Because there's a spiritual battle going on. Do you know the rest of that verse? "We don't wrestle against flesh and blood," Ephesians Chapter 6 verse 12, "but against rulers..." You're going to say, well, right there, there are physical leaders. No, we're not talking about physical leaders. Listen, now, these are words that are used elsewhere in Scripture to talk about the levels of authority within the angelic ranks -- rulers, "authorities," now we get it very clearly, "cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil."

This is a picture of spiritual opposition to the message that we have. If you start looking at every religion is telling people that they've got the wrong ideas and you should listen to their ideas. But have you ever noticed that it seems that only biblical evangelical Christianity gets the kind of visceral opposition that it gets and all the other religions get a pass? They might not get a complete pass, but the kinds of things that happen in the push-back to biblical evangelical Bible-believing Christianity is a kind of pushback that other groups aren't getting. I mean, it's a kind of singularity of focus, it seems, in the hostile forces in our day that push against that. Why? Because it's a spiritual battle.

I had the honor of, and I say that, I mean that with all my heart, of doing over an hour, I think it was, of Q&A with our fifth and sixth graders. They had an open night Q&A with Pastor Mike. So, I came to our big hall across the way and we had a roomful of 10- and 11-year olds that free-for-all you can ask Pastor Mike whatever questions you want. You may think, well, what in the world? What crazy questions did you get from 10- and 11-year olds? Can I tell you this? Exactly the same questions you ask. I mean, seriously. Exactly the same. And they were all good questions. That's why I say it was a privilege. It was as though God had prepared me in this in just kind of thinking through what I'm doing.

I do a lot of Q&A in my ministry, some of you know, and so I thought, I don't usually do it with 10- and 11-year olds, but I went there thinking, God, these kids are going to have questions that I assume are the same kinds of questions that everyone has about God. And was it not just... I mean, that's exactly what happened. These are great, great questions. One of the questions, I don't even know if it made it to the platform, it was one I think I might have done afterwards as the kid came up to me and he says, "Why would Satan if he knows he's defeated," and this is a Mike Fabarez paraphrased, but said something like, "why is he still causing so much trouble? I mean, if he has lost, why is he causing so much trouble? Why is he harassing us?" Okay?

Great question. I've had that from wise, you know, old, seasoned Christians. A great question. And I tried to, you know, on the spot, come up with an illustration. I thought it was a decent one that I want to share with you. I said, listen, think about the punky kid at your school. I didn't use that language. It was like the troublemaker, I think I said. Right? But you and I, the punk. Right? You picture the punk at school. He gets suspended. After being in a lot of trouble, he'd been to detention, he had his name on the board and he gets suspended. This time the principal himself



comes to the class and says, "You are now officially out. As a matter of fact, you've caused so much trouble, you are out and you're never coming back. There's no hope of you coming back. You can never come back to this school. You're going to be escorted off the premises. We're going to lock the chain link fence with the padlock behind you. You're never coming back."

And I ask the question, so what do you think his behavior is going to be like as he goes to his desk, has to clean it out, goes to his locker, let's just picture a locker, maybe junior high, and has to clean out his locker and he gets escorted down the halls. How is he going to deal with that whole situation? Do you think he's going to dutifully, nicely go down the halls just saying, "Oh, Okay. Well, I guess I'm out." Good to see you, who's not a bad person, who's doing the principal's will and go, "Oh, yeah. Hey, how are you? See you. Well, I guess I won't see it. I won't see you here. You know, I'm out." No way. He will cause trouble. What kind of havoc will be wreaked by a guy who knows that he's absolutely done, that the authority has ruled against him and he is banished? Well, he's not currently banished right now. He's right now going through the classroom and through the hallways, kicking desks over and dumping stuff out of lockers and causing as much trouble as possible.

"Lo, his doom is sure," as the old hymn says, Martin Luther would say. The Bible's very clear. He has been judged at the Cross. Colossians is very clear. I mean, the principalities have been judged, but they're causing a lot of trouble and a lot of trouble for you. Because you're down the hallway trying to convince someone to submit themselves to the will of the principal. Here come the gang that's getting kicked out down the hall. Do you think they're going to stay out of that conversation? No way. The rebels are going to rebel and they're going to work hard and push back against your efforts to spread and expand the Lordship of Christ over more people. That's the last thing they want. They hate the principal and they don't like you trying to get people to obey the principal, to submit to him, to trust in him, to learn to love him, none that they want. There will be a spiritual battle. You do not wrestle against flesh and blood. I mean, you do in the sense that they're the ones who are giving you a hassle. They're the ones who might revile you and scorn you and exclude you. And one day, maybe even in our culture, maybe sooner than later, they might imprison us. They might actually persecute us in physical ways. But you know what? There's something pushing that. There's something fueling that.

The kind of persecution that's going to come on the world is not a banishment of religion. Right? In that sense, you know, Marx and Nietzsche, you guys were wrong. I mean, this is not a religionless society. We will always be a religious world. It's just that they're not going to want biblical Christianity. They don't want your brand of religion. They don't want you talking about the Lordship of Christ and the death on his cross and penal substitutionary atonement taking care of your sin and you having a singular focus on Jesus being the only way. I've quoted it, maybe too much, but that Barna report that came out a year or two ago that said that millennials, the young evangelical Christians, half of them believe that is wrong for you to evangelize. They think it's immoral. It's wrong for you to go around persuading other people to trust in Christ. I mean, this is the mindset of even the young churchgoers, and I call them that, because I don't think you really can understand Christianity if you don't think that our call is to call people to faith in Christ. How can they be saved unless they trust in Christ? How can they trust in Christ unless someone tells them? We need someone to tell them. This is the point of Christianity.



"Follow me, I'll make you fishers of men." And so it is that we must recognize that if we're doing the work that we're then not pressured by the culture to shut our mouths. If you open your mouth, guess what? You're going to be in a spiritual battle. You going to have a lot of pushback that's going to be harder and stronger than you might think.

So I want to give you a couple of rules real quick before we leave this point. I know they're not here derived from verses 1 and 2. I'll give you a little caveat and put a little asterisk by it. They're biblical points. But when I think about people being greatly annoyed and who knows what they might do to us when we proclaim the truth of Jesus, I want you to recognize there are two things you've got to make sure you do. Frankly, they're super important and in our day they're more important than ever because these people can get under our skin so quickly. When you don't get the promotion, when people exclude you from things, when you somehow suffer monetarily because of your Christianity, you're going to be tempted and I want you to remember these two things.

The first one comes from Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verses 3 through 5. Jot that down, Second Corinthians Chapter 10 verses 3 through 5. It would remind of us this. Let me summarize it, OK? That we have to "stay in the battle of ideas." Right? This is a battle and it's a spiritual battle, but we as Christians stay within the arena of words and ideas. That's the battle we're in. We're in the battle of argumentation. We're trying to change people's minds as distasteful as that is to some apparent younger millennial evangelicals. Right? This is our job to change people's lives, "Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord," to quote Second Corinthians Chapter 5, "we persuade people," we're persuading men to change their minds.

All I'm saying is we stay in that realm even when the disproportional response is to that some kind of persecution. They may do things to you because you're simply trying to change their mind, and you might say, great, I'm rolling up my sleeves then and going at it. This has nothing to do, by the way, with the principle of self-protection. It has nothing to do with criminal justice. Right? There are issues, I can go to passages all throughout the Scripture, we've studied Luke regarding personal defense and we looked at it clearly in Romans 13 regarding the government. I'm talking about when people are persecuting you because you are a Christian, when they're pushing back against you because you're sharing the gospel. There needs to be a willingness in this regard to not get outside the realm of battling for ideas.

I'm going to quote the passage for you now, Second Corinthians Chapter 10 says, "We may walk in the flesh," we're living here in our physical body, "but we don't wage war according to the flesh." Some religions do. They advance their cause and their theology with the sword. Christianity is not entitled to, nor is it allowed to do that. That's not our job. We have weapons of warfare, but they're not of the flesh. They're not real physical weapons of warfare. No, they've got power, they have divine power to destroy strongholds, but they're not physical strongholds, they're not fortresses, they're not shooting down the guns and tit-for-tat and getting in the realm of something other than ideas. No, we stay right there. "We destroy," here it is, verse 5, "arguments." That's what's we're going at. We're arguing. Not arguing in the bad sense in that our veins are popping out of our forehead and our neck. I'm talking about we engage in debate. "We



destroy arguments and every lofty opinion." And Oprah's got a lot of them and so does everyone else. Right? They're giving you opinions, "raised up against the knowledge of God."

If it doesn't square with what God has revealed himself about himself, well, then we're going to tear it down. Matter of fact, we're going to try to, here it comes, "take every thought captive." You're in a war. You are taking prisoners here and the prisoners you're taking here, you're taking their thoughts captive, "to obey Christ." You're in the realm of ideas. You battle within the arena of ideas. If we're in a chess match, we stay here battling in a chess match. If they start to throw punches, we're not throwing punches back. And I say that because even as I say that, you may think it's a metaphorical response. That's why I said there are two rules.

I want you to add this second rule. There are plenty of verses you can jot down for this one. Let me quote a few. I want you to not even roll up your sleeves and punch them back verbally. I'll put it this way, rule number two, "Never Be Vindictive." In the realm of ideas, I'm debating ideas about thoughts regarding God, I'm never going to be personally vindictive with my words because you may think, well, as long as I'm dealing with a battle of ideas and if it's about words and proclaiming things, well, then if they start attacking me with ad hominem arguments, well then, I guess, you know, free game, I can go back. That's not, the Bible doesn't give us that. Right?

Matter of fact, here's what it says, Romans Chapter 12 verse 14. Romans 12:14. "Bless those," that's a verbal thing, "Bless those who persecute you." And as though we didn't get it, here's the second half of that verse, "Bless them and do not curse them." Well, they're cursing us. They're slandering us. They're maligning us. You're right. But you don't have the right just because we're dealing with ideas and words and concepts and messages and philosophies and theologies to say, well, I going to use my words now cause I'm still in the realm of ideas and I get to slander them back. No, you don't. Matter of fact you're supposed to say good. "Bless them." That's the literal word means to say good, good things.

First Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 12, First Corinthians 4:12. "When reviled," Paul gives us as an example in his own life, "we bless," When they revile us we bless them. "When we're persecuted, we endure." So we endure this as much as we want to roll our sleeves up and when they start with ad hominem attacks on our personal character or whatever, I want to go after them. Don't. Self-control. And then the example. First Peter Chapter 2 verse 23. First Peter Chapter 2 verse 23. "When Jesus was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten." Those are words. He could use words to go after them and attack them verbally. No, instead, "he continued, entrusting himself to the one who judges justly."

That reminds me of the principle that ramps up in Romans 12 when it says, "Bless, don't curse." Right? You need to say positive things, not cursing them. Then it says, remember this, talking about entrusting ourselves to a righteous judge, God says, and he quotes the Old Testament, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay." What does he start that with? Leave room for God's response. You let God deal with the ad hominem stuff. You let God deal with the pushback. Don't get involved in the arguments when they're no longer arguments in the best sense of the word. You stop having a debate. You stop having a battle of ideas and you start now attacking one another. Yeah, we give a defense and its warfare, it's a spiritual warfare. We give a defense for the hope



that's in us, yet we do it with, you know the verse, "gentleness and respect." And that means that we do not, with our mouths, engage with people in a vindictive, retaliatory way.

It's a spiritual battle. When I start using battle motifs and I only do it because the Bible does it, especially when it comes to our evangelism, you might feel like you have license then, and I watch some of it happen. I watch it happen online. I watch it happen sometimes on your Facebook page. I watch it happen on Twitter. I watch the kind of verbal assaults going on and Christians get into it way too fast. I'll just read it again. "Bless those who persecute you." Bless them, do not curse them. That's so important. And that's not just profanity. That's reviling them. Don't revile in return.

"When Jesus was reviled," First Peter 2:23, "he did not revile in return; he kept entrusting himself to the one who judges justly." Understand our spiritual battle. It is a naturally opposed message. It is a supernaturally opposed message. You just need to keep your cool and you need to be self-controlled.

Acts 4:1, "They were speaking. Authorities came on. They were greatly annoyed." We've all experienced that. If you've ever opened your mouth about the true gospel, you've experienced that. Then what did they do? Verse 3, "They arrested them and put them in custody until the next day for it was already evening." They arrested them. Here were the leaders. They arrested the leaders. They put them in prison. Talk about a disproportional response. It doesn't say they were annoyed and they debated with them. They were annoyed and they arrested them. "It's not fair. It's not right." No, you're right. It's not right. It's an unjust imprisonment.

But I want us to think about those guys preaching the gospel and getting a disproportional negative response, and I want to ask you the question, are we willing to do that? I mean, that is really the thing that Jesus kept saying. You need to know that if you really want to be my follower, you've got to align yourself with me and they hated me. John 15. This was the Upper Room Discourse, the locker room talk before they went into the world to do their work of being evangelists. He says, "They hated me and if they hated me. Guess what? They're going to hate you."

"Now, if they accepted my teaching, they're going to accept yours," and sometimes they do. Then it says this, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because I chose you out of the world, that's why they don't love you." They hate you. "Do you think a servant is above his teacher?" Right? I mean, is the master going to be maligned but you, as the servants, the followers, you're less than him, you're going to somehow have them all like you? And again, I preach this message and I guarantee there are people sitting here going, "Oh, here he goes again. The world doesn't hate me. The people at work love me." Then here's the deal. There's got to be something wrong with the way you're interacting with those around you. "Oh, great. You want me to be mean?" I don't want you to be mean. "You want me to jam my religion down their throat?" I never said to jam your religion down anyone's throat. As a matter of fact, I want you, when they say, "I don't want to hear anymore," I want you to stop talking to them about it. But I don't want you to stop talking about Christ.



I'm looking for low-hanging fruit. I love that. I love putting the basket under the tree and just having it fall in. That's great. But I don't know whether the fruit is ready to be harvested until I start picking at it. And you know what? They don't like that. And I'm going to be told to shut up. I'm going to be told to back down. It's not just that they want me to shut up with them, they want us to shut up. But here's the thing. You can't and you got to be willing to have your hands slapped. You've got to have your willingness to say, even if it costs me imprisonment, and let me put it that way, would you be willing to take the hit that these guys incurred right here?

Hebrews Chapter 13 says you ought to "Remember those in prison," and we're not talking about the people in our prisons who have done it because of some kind of criminal activity. We're not talking about the felons who've done some kind of immoral behavior. We're talking about the people in the book of Hebrews who were imprisoned and had their stuff confiscated because they stood with Christ. It was the captain of the temple. It was the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin and the priest who were putting people in prison. Here was the writer of Hebrews saying this, you need to understand that there are people in prison. "You need to remember them," that was a mental act, "as though you were in prison with them." I think that starts with do I have the same commitment that they had that put them there? Am I there, too? Am I willing to take that kind of hit?

Number two on your outline, let's just jot it down that, be willing, that's the biblical call. You need "Be Willing to Take a Hit." Jot it down. Be willing to take a hit, and that hit, I put it there as broadly as I can in some kind of analogous form, because I don't know what form that's going to take for you. One day it may be a punch in the mouth. I don't know. I mean, it may be something where we have to lose our finances, we may have to lose our client, we may have to lose our colleagues, we might have to lose our jobs. And who knows? Right now, as I said, all over the world, people are losing their lives. Matter of fact, more people are being martyred for the faith of Christ today than ever before. Do you recognize that? I know there are a lot more people on the planet right now, but I am saying there is a proportional increase of persecution of the Church all over the world, from China to Southeast Asia and Indonesia, all the way through North Africa and the Middle East and in European countries. Even today, we still have churches being persecuted, not just through litigation and through losing their freedoms to preach the gospel in some kind of legal forensic way. I'm talking about the pushback against families and people and physical freedoms being removed. I think we've got to say, hey, would I be willing to do that?

Once you get there, it's almost like the old saying, you know, you got to find something you're willing to die for and then live for it. I mean, am I willing, let's just start with this, to be jailed for sharing the gospel. If I said this week on Tuesday, if you open your mouth in the lunchroom about Christ, if you take that guy at work out on Friday afternoon and you go to a game or something and you sit there and share the gospel, he might report you and you might get arrested. You might get booked there in Santa Ana, at the booking desk, at the intake. You might get jailed, you might get handcuffs put on you and walk to a cell and have that cell closed behind you and hear that and hear all those people down the hallway in jail because of your sharing the gospel. Are you ready to take that kind of hit? I mean, it's a possibility. One day this is going to get here. You get to a place, it may be this is the reality. Matter of fact, I know in the book of Revelation, this is



going to gear up to a place that by the Time of Jacob's Trouble hits on this earth this is going to be commonplace.

And so it is for us to say, I am willing, I am willing to suffer the consequences of sharing the gospel. If you don't have that willingness, then I want to say what the Apostle Paul said to Timothy, you've got a problem and the problem is probably your timidity. And you think somehow your timidity, it corresponds to Christianity and it doesn't. Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel," Romans Chapter 1 verse 16. And he says in Second Timothy Chapter 1, "Hey Timothy, don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord and don't be ashamed of me, his prisoner." And do you know the next line? He says, suffer, "Suffer with me for the gospel of Christ Jesus. That picture of the willingness to say, hey Timothy, you cannot hide even in your pulpit there in Ephesus as this young pastor in a church, even if you surround yourself with Christian. No. You got to be on the front line. Everyone has to share their faith. Everyone has to be vocal about the gospel and you need to be willing to suffer. Don't distance yourself from Christ and his testimony and don't distance yourself from me, because I'm sitting here in a prison suffering because of the gospel.

If you're signing up for the chess team, I might recognize that you don't think you're going to get blood on your shirt, but if you're signing up for the wrestling team or you're signing up for the football team, you'd have a different expectation. I'm saying, though, we cannot hit back. We can't even slander back. We can't curse back when we're cursed, I still need you to know, we're signing up for something that's going to involve a hit, a hit of some kind. We need to be able to say, as Jesus taught us in that day, "When I'm hated in that day, when I'm spurned or reviled or excluded," I'm quoting now Luke Chapter 6, "rejoice." That's a hard thing to do. Rejoice.

They're going to rejoice at one point in this passage because they are counted worthy to suffer with Christ. But right now, I want to say I want to be able to say, even if I don't get invited to the office party because they see me as the Christian freak in the office, I'm going to rejoice. Matter of fact, Jesus says leap for joy. That's going to be hard but try to jump, would you, when you go back to your office. Jump. Why? Because that's how they treated the prophets who went before you. That's going to be a hard thing to do. But it starts with a mindset that we're in a battle, a battle that is going to cost, a battle that's going to incur some kind of injury to my Christian life. So I'm willing to do it. I'm willing to stand with other Christians who have gone through this.

I always invite you in a sermon that touches on these topics to read more about the persecuted Church. And though I didn't have a lot of room for a lot of titles, I put a couple on the back. I mean, the classic is reading at least the "Foxe's Book of Martyrs." You really need to read that book. If you've not read it ever go to Audible, you can have it read to you at night, as you, you know, exercise or whatever, sit in your chair. I mean, you've got to at least see that our spiritual forefathers have suffered greatly. And if you want to read a modern book, you can read Greg's book, a friend of ours, of our church, teaches there at Cal Baptist, Greg Cochran wrote a book, "Christians in the Crosshairs," which goes into not only ancient but modern persecution of the Church today. We need to study these things, understand these things and recognize we have joined a movement that is trying to expand the Lordship of Christ into more and more places,



starting with your neighbors and your co-workers and your family members. It's going to incur some pushback and we've got to be willing to pay the price.

Now, these kinds of songs aren't making the top 10 in Christian contemporary music anymore. But in the old days, they used to write songs like this. Remember this one as a kid, "Onward Christian Soldiers"? Right? Listen to these words: "Onward Christian soldiers, marching," remember this, "as to war." Right? Who signs people up for Christianity saying that, "Ready to go to war?" Do you know who does? Jesus. Constantly. The picture of you counting the cost and then enlisting in illustration in Luke 14 about a king going into battle. I mean, this is a war. What kind of war? Well, Christ is at the front, "With the cross of Jesus going on before. Christ, the royal master, leads against the foe: Forward into battle see his banners go!"

In the ancient world when they would go in, and this, of course, is a picture of the, you know, medieval kinds of battles where you'd have banners and behind the banners you'd have the armies. The banners would remind us that the captains of the army who were fighting for the king in the medieval period, here's a picture of us as Christians seeing the banner of Christ. We're under the banner of Christ. Well, the battle for us is not taking up arms against non-Christians. It's us pulling people with battles of ideas, taking down all these lofty opinions that raise themselves up against the knowledge of God. It's about the argumentation of changing people's minds about who they are, about who God is, and about what Christ has done for us and pulling them under the banner of Christ, expanding the umbrella, the reach of Christ's Lordship. That's the picture. "I will build my church, and the gates of hell," which are trying to stop us from expanding, "will not prevail against us."

I hope we're willing to take whatever hit might come. When Paul was in Ephesus and he was told in Acts 20 you're going to go to Jerusalem and the people in Ephesus after 3 1/2 years, said, "Paul, we don't want you to go." He said, "Well, I'm going to go. I don't know what's going to happen to me other than the fact that I know that imprisonment and afflictions await." Then he said this. "But that may be happening as I expand the gospel and see the Lordship of Christ expand over more people." "But I don't account my life as of any value to myself or precious to myself, but only that I can finish the course and the ministry that God has given me to testify of the gospel of the grace of God." I don't really care about me. I care about finishing the task God has called me to.

I watched this video of some promotion of kids in education or something, and it just, under the banner of Christianity, tried to, you know, I just, I grated against everything that it tried to promote in terms of trying to get my kids to see themselves of "great value and worth and value in their lives." It was just so sickening to me, this American culture of this kind of propping up our kid's egos, and it's "all about being all you can be." Listen, here's what it's all about. You seeing yourself as nothing. Counting your life as worth nothing or precious to you. I mean, those were the words used in this thing. It just turned my stomach. It was antithetical to the Christian message. I want to raise kids who don't care about their lives being precious to themselves. I want them to care about the task being precious to them. That they would say, I'm willing to do anything that it takes, even if it costs me my life, to finish the course that God has set out for me. That's the picture of biblical Christianity. It starts with saying I'm willing to pay the price. I'm



going to live for Christ even if it throws me in jail. I going to share the gospel, even if it excludes me from the cool circle. I want to be sure to do the right thing, even if it costs me money on my paycheck. I'm willing to stand up for the gospel of Christ. Be willing to take a hit.

Well, that's the negative part. "Well, you did real well with the negative part, Pastor Mike. We feel real negative now." (audience laughter) Well, here's the positive, verse 4. "But," that contrasting conjunction is helpful. You're going to get a lot of pushback when you share the gospel. But here's the thing. Just as Jesus said, they're going to hate you. But you know what? "If they listened to me, they're going to listen to you." And there were some who listened. Well, here, look at this. There's a harvest right here. "But many of those who heard the word were..." annoyed. Well, no, no, no. There were some annoyed, "but there were many who believed, and the number of the men came to be about 5,000." That's an amazing thing. Here was the Church growing and growing and growing. We saw them taking a headcount in Chapter 3. It came to 3,000. Now they got 5,000 men who are being counted here. This is a huge harvest. It's the thing, by the way, that fuels everything in the Bible when it comes to people who care about expanding the gospel in their sphere of influence. Its people saying what I care about is what Luke 15 cares about, and that is even if it were one sinner who comes to repentance, I'm going to rejoice. It gives those illustrations like someone finding a coin that they lost. "Yea, I found a lost sheep." "Yea, I found a lost son." "Yea, let's celebrate and let's feast." Heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. To have in front of me the prize. The prize is hard for us to envision because it's not here yet. In other words, the things that I want to see that I'm willing to suffer for in the workplace this week are the people that may come to Christ this week. That's hard to do. But I want to keep that growing, expanding Church in view. I want to see that victorious expansion of the Lordship of Christ over more people be the thing that motivates and fuels me in an optimistic way.

I put it this way. Number three, you need to "Keep Christ's Growing Church in View." I need to see it, Christ is going to grow it, and that means this: Look down your aisle. Do you see an empty seat? Look at the empty seats. Are there a couple of empty seats in this room? Those empty seats, the goal is I can't wait to see them filled. I can't wait to see... I'm willing to suffer to see them filled. You know that's really hard for us to do. We had this, you know, child dedications we call them here at the church, and we get kids up here and parents up here. It's one thing to look at the smiling, dimpled cheeks of these kids and say, "Oh, there's my kid, I love them and I'm going to save for them and I'm going to sacrifice for them." It's easy to set up a 529 plan for a kid who I love, who sits around my kitchen table and I'm going to say, "I'm going to give, I'm going to sacrifice, can't take that vacation, can't buy that neat hobby thing because I'm going to invest in my kids." That's one thing. What's really hard, ask young married couples who don't have kids, how hard is it for you to start that 529 plan before you meet these kids? Really hard. It's hard because I don't know them. I have no affinity for them. It's just a theoretical thing for me.

Two chapters before Paul says those things about his life not being worth anything to himself, he just wants to finish the task, when Paul was in Corinth in Acts Chapter 18, Christ appears to him and says, in this vision, you're going to have a really hard time in Corinth, but I don't want you to bail out. Here's what he says. He says this in verse 10, "I'm with you, you're not going to be ultimately harmed," I want you to keep on speaking, "because I have many in this city who are my people." Right? They weren't in the band of disciples yet. They couldn't be counted yet. But I got



more people who need to be in this and they're there. I want you to be willing to take the hit for the potential of people that Christ knows there are more people. There are people to fill these seats right here and they're out there, they're in your neighborhoods, they're at the classes, they're in your kid's, you know, sports leagues. You can see them.

The Bible says, here is Paul being warned to put up with the hard stuff so that you can see those people who are mine join our team. Paul had that perspective and in the very last letter he wrote in Second Timothy when he told Timothy, "Get over yourself. Don't be ashamed." He says this about the suffering he's going through, because this is his second Roman imprisonment and he's going to have his head chopped off in Rome. He sees that coming, at least in a general sense, and he knows he's suffering, and he says, "but you know what, I'll endure everything for the sake of the elect." Now, he's not thinking now looking in the eyeballs of the people who are already saved. Noticed this next line. This is Second Timothy Chapter 2 verse 10, "That they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus," that they might be saved. I'm willing to endure everything, he sits in a prison, for the people who are going to be saved. You have to keep the Church in view of God's growing, expanding Church.

As long as I'm quoting old songs, let's quote the fourth verse of that old hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers." It says this: "Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane; But the Church of Jesus Constant will remain. Gates of hell can never 'Gainst the church prevail; For we have Christ's own promise, Which can never fail." The picture of looking forward at the horizon optimistically, that God is going to not only fill this church, but he's going to fill our daughter churches, and that we're going to have to plant more churches, not just 50 miles away and 500 miles away, but we're going to plant churches 10 miles away that Christ is going to fill with people in this city, in this county who need to be saved. That's the perspective of the growing Church in the book of Acts.

Let me test your endurance here as we come in for a landing. Ready? I'm going to read 15 passages for you. Very short. 15 passages of the flavor of the book of Acts. Maybe you've never heard them back to back and you don't catch it. It is the overwhelming emphasis of an optimistic focus on seeing the Church grow. Acts 2:41, "And they were added that day," remember these words, "about 3,000 souls." Acts 2:47, "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 4:4 in our passage, "And many of those who heard the word believe, and the number of the men came to be about 5,000." Acts 5:14, "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women." Acts Chapter 6 verse 1, "And the disciples were increasing in number." Acts 6:7, "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem." Acts 9:31, "So the church was being built up and it multiplied." Acts 11:21, "And a great number who believed turned to the Lord." Acts 11:24, "And a great many people were added to the Lord." Acts 13:49, "And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region." Acts 14:1, "And a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed." Acts 14:21, "And they preach the gospel to that city and they made many disciples." Acts 16:5, "And the church, they were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily." Acts 17:12, "And many therefore believed," many believed, "and not just a few Greek women of high standing as well as men." Acts 18:8, "The ruler of the synagogue believed in



the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians were hearing Paul and they believed and were saved." Many of them.

The book of Acts is all about us getting excited about the growing Church. So much so that that becomes an obsession, the harvest field, that we would say we're willing to take a hit and engage in the spiritual battle. Bring it on. "Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war." This isn't a problem for us. We're not afraid of it. We value it more than we value our comfort.

I quote it all the time, you may get tired of hearing it, but that great line that announces, in the tribulational period, the coming end, when it says, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord," God the Father, "and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever." You hear me quote that all the time. A couple of chapters later, there's a recapitulation of that simple announcement that the end is come. This time it reminds us that the rebel has finally been taken off the campus and the padlock on the chain-link fence has been locked. This is the forecast, the announcement of it. So you see the same theme and yet you have that added element, the picture of all this battle being as, I don't like the battle, I don't want the spiritual battle. We one day will not have this battle.

So the announcement in Revelation Chapter 12 verse 10, "I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down.'" He's done. And then it looks back and it says, yes, "The brothers who conquered him," they did it by two things. They conquered him. They endured the battle. They continued to push against the enemy who is blinding the eyes of unbelievers. They fought the battle against the gates of hell. The Christians prevailed. Why? By two things, "the blood of the lamb," they were Christians, they got saved, they got right with God, God became their Father, empowered their battle, AND they opened their mouth "by the word of their testimony." They spoke up. And then one more line, and here's why I quote it, "For they loved not their lives even unto death." Even if it costs them everything, they said, I love the expanding Lordship of Christ over more and more people, more than I love my own life. I don't love my life even unto death.

Can you see the difference in the Christianity that's peddled so often from the platforms and pulpits of a lot of places that seem to make it seem like it's all about you getting yours and then God's going to pamper you and it's all great? As opposed to the old school Christianity of the Bible that says, "Hey, follow me, I'll make you fishers of men." Come and join the Church and you'll have to be battling down the gates of hell. "Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war."

This is the picture of biblical Christianity, to love the expanding militant Church in the battle of ideas, winning souls for Christ that I'm going to commission you this week to get out there and make it happen again. If you're weary in the battles, strengthen your hands, strengthen those feeble knees, get back in the battle. You don't know everything? Fine, great. Start the conversation. Find out that the arguments aren't really as hard as you think they are. Engage in the question -- "what do you think happens when you die? What do you think about Jesus? What do you think about biblical Christianity? Have you ever read the Bible?" Get the conversation going and point people to Christ. You can expect opposition, but it's worth it.



Let's pray. God, help us, please, in our battle of ideas, even when they stand up and take a punch at us whether that's relational, emotional, economic, whatever it might be. We recognize that we have a God who has called us to suffer hardship as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. God, we don't revel in the pain. We don't even like the opposition. Like I said, I'd love to just do the work of the harvest just by having fruit fall into the basket. But I get it. Get out there. I got to climb some trees. I got to shake some branches. I got to find those who are willing to listen and whose hearts have been prepared and open, the good soil who are going to bear fruit 30, 60, 100-fold. Help us God this week to cast the truth of the word out to more and more people, that you might be honored and pleased by your Church being vocal. Overcoming because the blood of Christ has cleansed us and made us right before you, the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony. God, let us do that, because we don't love our lives not even unto death. We love you. We love your Church. We want to serve you and give our all to it. God, motivate us and fuel us to do that.

In Jesus name. Amen.