

²³ And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.' ²⁷ For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness. ³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

Text: Acts 4:23-33 A 4/22/18 1 John 3:1-3 John 10:11-18 Psalm 46 Responsive Psalm: 23
Hymns: 193, 798, 451, 15

STAND UP FOR JESUS

Stand up!—stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the Cross!
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss.
From vict'ry unto vict'ry
His army shall He lead
Till ev'ry foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up!—stand up for Jesus!
The trumpet-call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict
In this His glorious day!
Ye that are men, now serve Him
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger
And strength to strength oppose.
(TLH #451:1-2)

Dear fellow believers in Christ, our almighty, living Savior,

The last few weeks we've heard about Peter healing a lame man by Jesus' power. Peter and John, who was with him, then spoke to the people there about Jesus and eternal salvation by faith in Him. The Jewish leaders were forced to admit to themselves, "...that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it." The leaders then commanded Peter and John to stop telling people about Jesus, to which they replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Fearing the people's reaction if Peter and John were punished, the leaders let them go (Ac. 4:13ff.).

Peter and John met up with some of their fellow believers and told them what had happened. We're told, *"When they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord"* (*"with one mind," "with one purpose"*) *"and said: 'Lord'"* (the original emphasizing that God's authority and power are absolute), *"You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them."* They praised the living God – the Almighty Creator and Ruler of all things who had made the lame man walk and delivered Peter and John from the same Jewish authorities who had Jesus crucified. *"Why should the heathen say, 'So where is their God?' But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases"* – Psalm 2:1-2.

The believers continued, quoting David in Psalm two, *"Why do the nations rage"* (from the original also, *"Why are the nations arrogant,"* and *"insolent"*), *"and the people plot vain things"* (from the original, *"Why do the people plot acts devoid of truth,"* *"acts which result in nothing"*). *"The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ."* By faith we understand that the world's attacks against God and His Son and His Church in reality are nothing. The world cannot defeat God and us, God's people. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Ro. 8:31b).

The believers acknowledged to God, *"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together."* Representatives of the mighty Roman government, most of the Jewish religious leaders and many of their own people, and the unbelieving world had in effect joined forces against God and against God's Son, Jesus. They made Jesus suffer terribly, and had Him put to death by cruel crucifixion. Jesus and His followers seemed helpless against such powerful opposition.

But that is through human eyes. The eyes of faith see things completely differently, as they truly are. Jesus hadn't been defeated. He had won! Speaking of Herod and Pilate and the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who brought about Jesus' death the believers acknowledged to God that those people had done *"whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before"* (from the original, *"whatever You decreed from eternity"*) *"to be done."* God didn't make Jesus' enemies demand His crucifixion, or make Pilate approve Jesus' crucifixion. That was their own doing. James says, *"God does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires"* (see Ja. 1:13–17). Pilate and Jesus' enemies thought they were in control. But God was ultimately in control, using the evil thing they did to Jesus to accomplish our salvation!

Peter says, *"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you"* (1 Pet. 4:12, NASB). The Bible says, *"There is nothing new under the sun"* (Eccl. 1:9b). Society's growing opposition and hatred toward Christ and us Christians is relatively new to us in the Western world, but it's *"nothing new."* *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever"* (He. 13:8). Jesus has

always been faithful to His people in the past, helping them and strengthening them for whatever they had to face. Jesus gives us the help and strength we need to face what we're facing from the world today.

Peter, John, and the others prayed, *"Lord, look on their threats."* Jesus knew what His people were facing then, and He knows what we Christians are facing now. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea"* (Ps. 46:1–2).

Peter, John, and the others prayed, *"Lord, ... grant to Your servants that with all boldness"* (from the original, *"openly," "with all free and fearless confidence," "with all cheerful courage"*) *"they may speak Your Word"* (from the original literally, *"they may keep on speaking Your Word"*) *"by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."* Jesus had just died, risen, and ascended. His New Testament Church was tiny, and just beginning to grow. At that time Jesus gave special gifts to some believers to work miracles, which helped to direct people to Jesus and confirm His Word His people were preaching and teaching. Jesus still heals and works His other miracles. But He no longer gives those special gifts to people of working miracles as He did in the earliest days of the New Testament. What He has given us is His Word, the Bible. He still gives His people *"all boldness"* to speak His Word. And Jesus' Word still has all of its power to save! *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"* – Romans 1:16.

After Peter, John, and the others prayed, *"The place where they were assembled together was shaken."* Jesus knew His people needed special assurance just then, and He gave it to them. Jesus may or may not answer our prayers in a dramatic way, but He always answers our prayers. Peter, John, and the others *"were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness."* Jesus urges us in His Word, *"Be filled with the [Holy] Spirit"* (Eph. 5:18b). If we will ask Him to, Jesus will fill us with His Holy Spirit and enable us to speak His Word with *"boldness"*: *"openly," "with all free and fearless confidence," "with all cheerful courage."*

What is the solution to the problems we see in the world today? It's the same solution to the world's problems in every age: Jesus and His Gospel. Satan is using the world to try to intimidate us Christians and make us shut our mouths and hide. But the world needs us Christians to stand up for Jesus and open our mouths and speak His Word to them.

We're told, *"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."* There was a time in the early New Testament Church when, out of love for Jesus and for one another, the believers voluntarily shared everything they had with each other. Although we don't

hear in the New Testament of this continuing, it's a wonderful example of the love and caring and support that always exists among Christ's people – a great blessing from God, especially during times of persecution.

“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” As Peter told the Jewish authorities, *“We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.”* Peter, John, and the other disciples had been with Jesus for three years, observing Him and learning from Him. They had seen Jesus die on the cross, and they had seen Him alive again after His resurrection. Jesus had *“opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”* about Him (Lk. 24:45). God had given them faith to know that Jesus is *“the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (see Mt. 16:13–17). And the Holy Spirit had filled them so they could bear powerful witness to Jesus' resurrection and all that it means for us.

“And great grace was upon them all.” God's undeserved love in Christ was upon them all in great measure, strengthening them, preserving their lives, filling their hearts, blessing them, keeping them in the faith, giving their lives their true meaning and purpose, and assuring them of eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

Jesus has put you and me on earth at this time of increasing persecution of Christians. What do we do? We look to Jesus. We keep turning to Jesus in prayer. We keep turning to His Word. As Jesus was with His people in His early New Testament Church, so Jesus is with us, His Church, now. As Jesus' *“great grace”* was upon His people in His early New Testament Church, so Jesus' *“great grace”* is upon you and me now. “Jesus, keep us faithful to You and Your Word. Enable us to faithfully bear witness to You and Your Word, that many more may be saved. Keep us as Your children as long as You have us here, and then take us to be with You in heaven.

Stand up!—stand up for Jesus!
 Stand in His strength alone;
 The arm of flesh will fail you,
 Ye dare not trust your own.
 Put on the Gospel armor,
 Each piece put on with prayer;
 Where duty calls or danger,
 Be never wanting there.

Stand up!—stand up for Jesus!
 The strife will not be long;
 This day the noise of battle,
 The next, the victor's song.
 To him that overcometh
 A crown of life shall be;
 He with the King of Glory
 Shall reign eternally. Amen.
 (TLH #451:3-4)