

Main Idea: If we’re going to be effective in speaking up for Jesus, we must accept three responsibilities, as did Peter and John in Acts 4:5-22.

- I. Expect opposition (5-7).
  - A. Peter and John faced intimidation (5-6).
  - B. Peter and John faced antagonism (7).
- II. Take advantage of opportunities (8-12).
  - A. Peter’s goal wasn’t to defend himself.
  - B. Peter’s goal was to preach Christ.
    1. We must tell people about His authority (9-10a).
    2. We must tell people about His crucifixion (10).
    3. We must tell people about His resurrection (10).
    4. We must tell people about His fulfillment of Scripture (11).
    5. We must tell people He is the only way of salvation (12).
- III. Be ready for the outcome (13-22).
  - A. We’ll develop a reputation (13-14).
    1. The focus shouldn’t be on us.
    2. The focus should be on Christ.
  - B. We’ll face resistance (15-17).
    1. They couldn’t deny the message.
    2. They attacked the messenger.
  - C. We’ll need to exhibit resolve (18-22).
    1. We must not seek to please people (18-19).
    2. We must seek to obey God (20).
    3. We must be willing to accept the consequences (21-22).

Make It Personal: It boils down to this.

1. Our maximum joy must be found in knowing Jesus.
2. When He is, we will delight in making Him known no matter what the cost.

*Gideon Presentation by Jack Branon*

*Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-18*

Andrew Brunson went on trial Monday in Turkey. Brunson, who is 50 and from Black Mountain, NC, is pastor at the Izmir Resurrection Church and has lived in Turkey for more than two decades. He has been in jail to this point for 18 months and now faces up to 35 years in prison.

His crime? He is charged with aiding terrorist groups in Turkey.

“I’ve never done anything against Turkey,” Brunson told the court on Monday. “I love Turkey. I’ve been praying for Turkey for 25 years. I want truth to come out.”

A few weeks ago his daughter, Jacqueline, shared a note written by her father. “Let it be clear. I am in prison not for anything I have done wrong, but because of who I am—a Christian pastor,” he wrote.

“I desperately miss my wife and children. Yet I believe this to be true: it is an honor to suffer for Jesus Christ, as many have before me. My deepest thanks for all those around the world who are standing with and praying for me.”<sup>2</sup>

In a moment we’re going to have a special time of pray for our brother, Andrew Brunson. And others, for he is not alone.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/march/pastor-andrew-brunson-turkey-indictment-life-sentence.html>

I read an interesting article entitled, “Christians the most persecuted group in world for second year.”<sup>3</sup> It cited a study released last year that revealed that 90,000 Christians were killed for their beliefs worldwide in 2016 (that’s 246 people every day), and as many as 600 million Christians were prevented from practicing their faith.

Let’s talk about one country, as an example. Iraq. According to the article, “The Christian population in Iraq alone has plummeted from 1.5 million in 2003 to current estimates of 275,000 and could be gone for good within just a few years, according to activists. The dwindling numbers are due to genocide, refugees fleeing to other countries, those who are internally displaced, and others hiding in plain sight and not allowing their faith to be publicly known.”

Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven (Matthew 5:11-12).”

[Let’s pray now for our “blessed” persecuted brothers and sisters]

It’s not easy to speak up for Jesus. Our world doesn’t want to hear about Jesus. Oh, it doesn’t mind a watered-down version of Jesus, a sentimental do-gooder, but it’s highly offended by the claims of anyone who would say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.”

Yet that’s what Jesus said. And He told His followers to tell the world what He said.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Savior, the *only* Savior who can reconcile sinners to God? Do you believe that it’s His will for us to call all men to repent and believe in Him?

What, then, should we do when the world says to be quiet? The dilemma is nothing new. Jesus’ first followers faced the same situation shortly after He returned to heaven, as we see in Acts 4.

This is such a timely passage. I’ve entitled the message, “Speak Up for Jesus.” According to Acts 4:5-22, if we’re going to speak up for Jesus, we must accept three responsibilities, as did Peter and John.

### I. Expect opposition (5-7).

Here’s the context. In Acts 1 Jesus ascended back to heaven. In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit descended to earth, baptized the followers of Christ, and launched the church into its mission. In Acts 3, while on their way to the temple, Peter and John healed a cripple. A crowd developed and Peter told the listeners about Jesus. The sermon resulted in the church growing to about 5,000 men.

Not everyone, however, was pleased. The Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John and put them in jail, intending to bring them to trial the next day (4:3). And so the opposition began for the church, and it hasn’t stopped since. For Peter and John, the opposition came in two forms.

**A. Peter and John faced intimidation (5-6).** “The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family.”

The author of Acts, Luke, is careful to identify the opposition for us. In verses 1-6 he mentions eleven individuals or categories of individuals who were opposed to

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/01/06/christians-most-persecuted-group-in-world-for-second-year-study.html>

Christianity. In verse 1 he mentions the priests, the captain of the temple guard (who was the second most powerful person in Jerusalem next to the Romans and the high priest), and the Sadducees.

In verse 5 he refers to the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law, the three groups that made up the Sanhedrin, the Jews most powerful decision-making group. The Sanhedrin was the senate and supreme court of the Jewish nation. It had seventy-one members. The high priest was the *ex officio* president.

In verse 6 Luke names some of the opponents: Annas, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander. Don't miss that according to Luke "other men of the high priest's family" were there, too.

Basically, this was a kangaroo court. It was made up of the high priest's family. According to the record, when the Romans deposed Annas years before from his leadership position, his son-in-law, Caiaphas, took his place. The fact is, five of Annas' sons held the office of high priest at one time or another! Talk about corrupt!<sup>4</sup>

It gets worse. Do the names Annas and Caiaphas sound familiar? They're the men who conspired in the trial of Jesus. And don't think they have any intention of giving Jesus' followers any break in this trial!

That's not all. According to verse 1, which group had a major role in the arrest of Peter and John? The Sadducees did. They also had a major role in the trial since at this time their "party" had majority control of the Sanhedrin (with the Pharisees occupying minority status).

There's not much good that can be said about the Sadducees. They were the religious "liberals" of the day. They were materialistic rationalists who denied belief in the supernatural, in angels, and above all, denied the Resurrection (Mark 12:18).

According to Kent Hughes, "To the Sadducees, the Messiah was simply an ideal and the messianic age a process."

Hughes continues, "These men had gained special ascendancy during the inter-testamental Maccabean period. During subsequent political regimes, they created a priestly nobility. They were the educated, wealthy elite. But they were also the unprincipled collaborationists, political sycophants who would sell their mothers to stay in power. Though a minority, they controlled Jewish political and religious life. They were evil control freaks, and they did not want anyone rocking their boat."<sup>5</sup>

Yes, it was pure intimidation. This trial would be a mockery of justice, but that didn't matter to the opposition. The court tried to use raw power to intimidate the followers of Jesus. James Boice explains, "They used their power because naked power is the only weapon the world really has. Sometimes it is the power of wealth; people who have wealth will often use it to control, exclude, or oppress others. The government will use the courts, policemen, guns, and eventually the army because in the last analysis this is the only power it has."<sup>6</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who was arrested and eventually executed by the Nazis. It was from his Flossenberg cell that the martyr wrote these words in 1937:

"Suffering...is the badge of the true Christian. The disciple is not above his master... Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 416.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> James Boice, *Acts*, p. 74.

memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake.' ... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer."<sup>7</sup>

It's true, beloved. If you are a follower of Christ, you will face opposition. Peter and John did. It came first of all in the form of intimidation.

**B. Peter and John faced antagonism (7).** "They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'"

In the Greek text, there's a scornful emphasis in the placement of the pronoun 'you' which connotes the sense, "By what power or name did *people like you* do this?"<sup>8</sup>

Notice, no charge is made. What charge could the Sanhedrin have leveled against the apostles? *You're guilty of healing a man?! In fact, the accusers don't even try to deny the miracle, just like they didn't with Jesus. They simply ask a question, a question about power. "By what power or name did you do this?"*

There's a power struggle going on here. Why did the Jewish leaders respond with antagonism towards Jesus, and why now were they doing the same towards His followers? The answer is *power*.

They wanted to be in control. That's why they rejected Jesus. He messed up their agenda. Remember, they were the authorities. And they didn't appreciate Jesus, nor His followers stepping on their turf.

Why do people today reject Jesus? For the same reason. They want to be in control. They want their agenda rather than God's.

The question was a trap. The court wanted to incriminate and thus discredit Peter and John as a couple of unauthorized miracle-workers.

So it's intimidation and antagonism. It's tough to stand up against them. During his years as premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev denounced many of the policies and atrocities of Joseph Stalin. Once, as he censured Stalin in a public meeting, Khrushchev was interrupted by a shout from a heckler in the audience.

"You were one of Stalin's colleagues. Why didn't you stop him?"

"Who said that?" roared Khrushchev. An agonizing silence followed as nobody in the room dared move a muscle. Then Khrushchev replied quietly, "Now you know why."<sup>9</sup>

It's sobering to behold the power of fear.

There was a test conducted by a university where ten students were placed in a room. Three lines of varying length were drawn on a card. The students were told to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the longest line. But nine of the students had been instructed beforehand to raise their hands when the instructor pointed to the second longest line. One student was the stooge. The usual reaction of the stooge was to put his hand up, look around, and realizing he was all alone, pull it back down. This happened 75% of the time, with students from grade school through high school.<sup>10</sup>

It's tough to stand alone, isn't it? It's tough to bow your head and pray before you eat in the school cafeteria. It's tough to be the only family member who's late for the

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<sup>7</sup> D. Bonheoffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 100, 101.

<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> *Today in the Word*, July 13, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> C. Swindoll, March 27, 1984.

reunion because you went to church first. It's tough to be the only one in the office who doesn't laugh at the off-colored joke.

The fear of man is a snare, according to Proverbs 29:25.

Remember, it was only three months or so before this trial that Jesus stood in this very room before these very same officials. At that time Peter was warming himself by the fire out in the courtyard, saying "I don't know the man!" Like we so often do, Peter caved under the pressure of the opposition that night.

But not this time. He's not running or denying this time. Rather, he's doing what we're called to do. Our second responsibility.

## II. Take advantage of opportunities (8-12).

Verse 8, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them." Please don't miss the connection between the Spirit's filling and boldness in speech. There's no way we can speak up for Jesus as we ought in our own strength. We are weak, and we're in big trouble the moment we forget that. But He is strong!

Jesus told His disciples, "They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them (Luke 21:12-13)."

Thankfully, that's not all Jesus predicted. He also told His followers what He would do for them in their hour of need, "But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. *For I will give you words and wisdom* that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict (Luke 21:14-15)."

That's exactly what He did here. Listen to Peter's response in verses 8-12: "'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'"

I want us to take note of something. Notice how Peter took the current situation and turned the topic of conversation *to Jesus*.

Many Christians struggle to do that. According to a recent study by Barna, 73% of Christians agree that we should share our faith in Christ with others, but only half (52%) said they actually shared the gospel with someone in the past year.<sup>11</sup>

Peter himself later gave this charge to believers in 1 Peter 3:13-15, "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.' But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. *Always be prepared to give an answer* to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

And Peter practiced what he preached. When an opportunity presented itself, he was ready. Indeed, he turned the opposition into an opportunity.

You say, "I want to be better at that. How can I?" The first thing you must settle is what's most important to you. Peter's goal comes through loud and clear in this scene.

**A. Peter's goal wasn't to defend himself.** Rather...

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/is-evangelism-going-out-of-style/>

**B. Peter's goal was to preach Christ.** It's true. Peter didn't try to save his neck. He didn't plead the fifth. In fact, instead of being intimidated by the opposition he saw it as an opportunity.

As he looked into the eyes of the court members that day he must have thought, as James Boice suggests, "In all my life I have never had a chance like this; I may never have a chance like this again. Look at this audience: the priests, the captain of the temple guard, the Sadducees, rulers, elders, teachers of the law, Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the other members of the high priest's family. I will never do better than this again. Why, if we had put on a great advertising campaign, we could never have gotten all these important people to come. But here they are. So let's preach Jesus."<sup>12</sup>

And preach Jesus he did! Watch how Peter responded by simply presenting the facts about Jesus. We, too, must learn to tell people the truth about Jesus.

1. *We must tell people about His authority (9-10a).* Peter said, "If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness...know this... It is *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*...this man stands before you healed." We didn't do this. Jesus did. This miracle was accomplished in the *name* of Jesus. Jesus has power, and Jesus made this crippled man's legs whole again.

2. *We must tell people about His crucifixion (10).* "Whom you crucified," Peter told the crowd. The One who did this miracle is the same person you nailed to two pieces of wood just weeks ago.

"We preach Christ crucified," said Paul. Peter did the same. Why did Jesus the Messiah come to earth? He came in order to die. We need to tell people that.

3. *We must tell people about His resurrection (10).* "Whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead." You killed Him, Peter told them, but He's no longer dead. God raised Him from the dead. And the fact that God raised Him shows that His assessment of Jesus is far different from yours.

Friends, we are giving a deficient witness to people if we merely tell them, "Believe in Jesus." Believe in what Jesus? And what about Jesus? Peter's message was a doctrinal message that was filled with biblical truth. He addressed the mind. He gave his hearers something to *think about*.

And so must we. We must tell people about Jesus' authority, about His crucifixion, and about His resurrection.

4. *We must tell people about His fulfillment of Scripture (11).* "He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'"

The image of the "stone" was not new to these men. They knew that in the Old Testament, the "rock" was a symbol of God (Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 31; 2 Sam 22:2; Ps 18:2). Indeed, the prophet Daniel used the rock to portray Messiah and the coming of His kingdom (Dan 2:31-45).

In his witness Peter quoted the Scriptures. Again, so must we. Which means we must memorize key Scriptures so we're ready.

Then comes the punch line...

5. *We must tell people He is the only way of salvation (12).* "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

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<sup>12</sup> Boice, pp. 76-77.

That's a very exclusive statement, isn't it? *No one else. No other name.*

There's no escaping this fact, brothers and sisters. To tell people that Jesus is the only way of salvation will offend some. Peter didn't offer Jesus as one option on the shelf. He said Jesus is the only way to heaven.

In fact, the word "must" in verse 12 indicates it's mandatory. Each person *must* be saved by Jesus. That includes you. To not be saved by Jesus is to be lost.

Church family, this is our mission—to know Christ and to make Christ known. It's why we're here. When Peter stood on trial before the Sanhedrin, his primary goal wasn't to secure his freedom. His goal was to help others come to know the Christ he loved.

Is that *your* goal in life? I'm convinced that the reason most of us aren't having the kind of influence for Christ that we could have is because we've lost sight of why we are here.

Friends, we need to learn to view every situation in life as an opportunity to fulfill our mission. *Every* situation.

When God gives us a child, it's an opportunity to know Christ better and make Christ better known. When God puts us in a tough job situation, it's an opportunity to know Christ better and to make Christ known. When He allows us to experience health challenges, it's an opportunity to know Christ better and to make Christ known. When He ordains a family challenge, it's an opportunity to know Christ better and make Christ better known.

Beloved, if God is sovereign, and He is, then problems are actually opportunities. That's how Peter saw it. His goal wasn't to get rid of the trouble. It certainly wasn't to make people like him. No, his passion was to make Christ known.

### III. Be ready for the outcome (13-22).

Opposition creates opportunities. Opportunities lead to an outcome. As we look at what happened to Peter and John, we get a good idea of what will happen to us if we choose to speak up for Jesus. We can anticipate three things.

**A. We'll develop a reputation (13-14).** "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say."

You could have heard a pin drop in the Sanhedrin. Luke says these powerful priests and their associates were "astonished" at these two Galilean fishermen. They had no degrees from the rabbinic schools. They were "unschooled" and "ordinary" men. There was only one factor to which they could attribute this powerful display.

They concluded that *these men had been with Jesus.*

Oh, may that be said of us! Do people look at us and conclude that what makes us who we are is Jesus.

Frederick the Great once called all his generals together. As the story goes, "One of them, Hans Von Zieten, had duties to perform at his church that night and a Communion to participate in, so he refused to come. Later he was invited to dine with all the generals and Frederick the Great. On that occasion they all made light of him and joked about his religious duties and about the Lord's Supper. Von Zieten stood and said to his intimidating ruler, 'My lord, there is a greater king than you, a king to whom I have sworn allegiance, even unto death. I am a Christian man, and I cannot sit quietly as the

Lord's name is dishonored, his character belittled, and his cause subjected to ridicule. With your permission I shall withdraw.'

"There was silence because the generals knew such a daring act could mean death. But Frederick the Great was so struck by Von Zieten's courage that he begged him to stay and promised him he would never again demean those sacred things."<sup>13</sup>

We need this reminder. When it comes to living...

1. *The focus shouldn't be on us.*
2. *The focus should be on Christ.*

If we speak up for Jesus, we'll develop a reputation. That's not all.

**B. We'll face resistance (15-17).** "So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name.""

People sometimes say, "If I could see a miracle, I'd believe in Christ!"

Actually, that's not true. The reason people don't see the beauty of Jesus is that the god of this age has blinded their minds. "They *cannot* see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ," says 2 Corinthians 4:4.

Rachel Chambers said it well in an email to us this week. She and Jim have been facing some very evil responses to their ministry in Zambia, in her words, "dark stuff: serpents, witch hunts, suicides, ignorance, empty superstitions, killings." Why? Why do people respond that way to the light God sends them.

I love Rachel's answer. "A thousand watts on a blind eyeball is still dark."

Lost people need more than light. They need new eyes.

It's true. It's true of your neighbor, and the guy you work with, and everyone else who doesn't know Christ. They're just like the men in Acts 4 who heard about Jesus from Peter and John.

1. *They couldn't deny the message. So...*
2. *They attacked the messenger.*

Which means if we're going to speak up for Jesus, thirdly...

**C. We'll need to exhibit resolve (18-22).** Adrian Rogers tells about the man who bragged that he had cut off the tail of a man-eating lion with his pocket knife. Asked why he hadn't cut off the lion's head, the man replied: "Someone had already done that."

It doesn't take any courage to cut the tail off of a dead lion. It takes a ton of courage to exhibit the type of resolve Peter and John demonstrated in Acts 4.

If we're going to speak up for Jesus, we must settle three things.

1. *We must not seek to please people (18-19).* "Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.""

Talk about a sanctified "in-your-face"! Know this. You can't speak up for Jesus and be a people pleaser. A second resolve...

2. *We must seek to obey God (20).* The battle line is drawn. Jesus said, "Tell the world about Me." The world says, "Don't tell." So we must make a choice. Which will it be? Will we seek to please people or obey God?

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<sup>13</sup> Kent Hughes, *Acts*, pp. 63-4.

It would have been so easy for Peter and John to rationalize, “Maybe we’d better tone it down. If we get arrested, it won’t be good PR for the church.”

No way. Listen again to their resolve, “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Just think of the challenge that faced the early church. As Warren Wiersbe observes, “Most of their ministers had jail records and would probably have a hard time today *joining* our churches, let alone *leading* them.”<sup>14</sup>

So how did they do it? It boiled down to this. They feared God rather than man. It was said of John Knox, “He feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.”

3. *We must be willing to accept the consequences (21-22).* “After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.”

Someone has said, “One advantage of being thrown on your back is that you face heaven.”<sup>15</sup> This wouldn’t be the last time Peter and John would be arrested for preaching Jesus. They were willing to practice civil obedience whenever human law violated God’s law. But they were also willing to accept the consequences.

Justin Martyr said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Expect opposition. Take advantage of the opportunities. Be ready for the outcome. According to Acts 4, that’s what it takes to speak up for Jesus in our world. Are we willing?

“Peter Cartwright (says Kent Hughes) was a circuit-riding Methodist preacher in Illinois. An uncompromising man, he had come north from Tennessee because of his opposition to slavery. One Sunday morning when he was scheduled to preach, his deacons told him that President Andrew Jackson was in the congregation. Knowing Cartwright was used to saying whatever he felt God wanted him to say, regardless how people might react, they warned him not to say anything that might offend the chief executive. He stood up to preach and said, ‘I understand President Andrew Jackson is here. I have been requested to be guarded in my remarks. Andrew Jackson will go to Hell if he does not repent.’”

The audience was shocked. They wondered how the President would respond to this, but after the service he told Cartwright, ‘Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world.’”<sup>16</sup>

Maybe Cartwright was a little brash. But maybe he had something we desperately need, a conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Make It Personal: It boils down to this.

1. *Our maximum joy must be found in knowing Jesus.*
2. *When He is, we will delight in making Him known no matter what the cost.*

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<sup>14</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 415.

<sup>15</sup> Bishop Sheen, taken from Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 64.