IDOP SERMON BUILDER

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

WHAT DO I WANT OUR CONGREGATION TO KNOW AS A RESULT OF THIS SERMON?

Peter and John were bold witnesses of the Gospel even in the face of difficulty. Even when they were told to stop speaking about Jesus, they could not help but to speak of what they had seen and heard.

WHAT SHOULD I CHALLENGE OUR CONGREGATION TO PURSUE AS BIBLICAL DISCIPLES?

When we know the redemptive power of Christ and the Gospel message, it overflows out of us. God empowers and emboldens his followers to proclaim the good news to those around them, no matter the cost. When we are bold in sharing the Gospel message, we resemble our brothers and sisters in Christ, like Bassam in the Arabian Peninsula.

WHY IS VOM TELLING THESE STORIES?

How can we remember our persecuted Christian family and their stories in prayer (Hebrews 13:3) if we do not know them? When we know stories like Bassam's, we are prompted in prayer to the one who has made Bassam our brother.

SERMON OUTLINE

CANNOT BUT SPEAK OF JESUS

ILLUSTRATION: Show The Voice of the Martyrs' International Day of Prayer Video, available at persecutionsa.org/idop.

ALTERNATE: Download the free resources for International Day of Prayer, available at persecutionsa.org/idop, and share the story of Bassam and our brothers and sisters experiencing persecution from their family in the Arabian Peninsula.

SCRIPTURE

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." **(Acts 4:13–20)**.

KEY VERSE: *"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."* **(Acts 4:20)**.

CORPORATE PRAYER (OPTIONAL):

O Heavenly Father,
To Thee, the Almighty, we ask for strength.
To Thee, the Omnipotent, we ask that Thou wouldst empower us.
To Thee, the Suffering Servant, we ask for grace to persevere.
To Thee, the Resurrected King, we ask that Thou wouldst embolden us.
To Thee, the Mighty Counselor, we ask for wisdom.

O God, we reflect upon the beauty of the cross;
for it is the only place where redemption is found,
and where a true and spiritual family is established.

This cross, once an emblem of shame and suffering,
is now a beautiful sight to the saints.

May this beautiful cross,
and this powerful gospel message,
never be hidden within us,
but rather overflow from us.

Lord, we ask that Thou wouldst
lead us in Thy love,
guide our steps by Thy grace,
teach us by Thy truth,
and use our speech for Thy glory.

Let our faith be active;
and in the face of fierce opposition,
may we be fearless in our proclamation.
Amen.

SERMON INTRODUCTION

Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the Book of Acts, which is foundational to our understanding of the early church and how God worked through our early Christian family. The resurrected Christ ascended into heaven after promising a helper, a counselor, one who emboldens and empowers — the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come upon his followers and empower them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. This is not simply a strategy but a biblical mandate, one that begins with our own community and expands to the entire world. For us, the Arabian Peninsula may feel like "the end of the earth," but our brothers and sisters in Christ living there consider it their Jerusalem. Christians in the Arabian Peninsula, like Bassam, are courageously living out their faith while facing persecution from the government and members of their community or family. In the midst of wars and chaos, the church in this region uses creative means to reach others with boldness and wisdom.

Acts 4:13–20 takes place after the Holy Spirit had come and Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost. The church grew rapidly as its members devoted themselves to one another (Acts 2:46-47). Peter and John had healed a man who was unable to walk since birth, which drew a crowd that then heard them preach about the Messiah (Acts 3:1–10). For this reason, the two were taken into custody and questioned by the rulers, scribes and all members of the priestly family. It is there, in the face of opposition, that we see the bold faith of Peter and John.

In this text, we see what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:10 when he says, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain." Peter and John had experienced grace firsthand. That grace led them to exercise bold faith, face fierce opposition and be fearless in their proclamation.

Bassam, our brother in Christ living faithfully in the Arabian Peninsula, placed his faith in Christ and was rejected by his Muslim family, including his wife. He clings to his Bible and to the truth of the Gospel. Through threats and constant persecution, Bassam perseveres. "I could not stay silent," he said. He now seeks to reach his family for Christ.

The faith we find in our text is also found in Bassam's story as well as many others in the Arabian Peninsula. Often, we read these passages and think this type of persecution is a thing of the past. This is not so. We have brothers and sisters throughout the Arabian Peninsula (and the world) who are standing for Christ despite intense opposition. These Christians are unable to remain silent about what God has done through his Son, Jesus Christ, and they hold fast to God's Word — doing so, as Bassam says, "no matter what happens to me."

ILLUSTRATION: Like Peter and John, an Indian evangelist risks martyrdom to boldly preach the Good News. "I ride my bicycle into a village and bang my drum," he said. "The people come out, and I share the Gospel. Sometimes they accept. Other times they beat me. When I wake up, I ride to the next village." (Adapted from *The One Year Pray for the Persecuted Bible* CSB, p. 501.)

1. Faith in Action (vv. 13–14)

a. In verses 13–14 (and in the preceding verses), we see an observed faithfulness in Peter and John. They were ministering to the lame (3:1–10) and boldly proclaiming the gospel message (3:11–4:4, 4:8–12). Peter and John walked in faith as they ministered to the man who had been born lame. He would have been dismissed by everyone walking past him and considered unclean by the religious leaders. But having seen Jesus sit with Zacchaeus, call Matthew the tax collector and minister to lepers and outcasts of society, Peter and John followed in his footsteps, exercised their faith and walked in daily obedience.

b. Being with Jesus produces evidence (v. 13).

i. Recognized by their bold speech

- Peter and John drew a crowd after the lame man was healed, and Peter stood up in Solomon's Colonnade and preached of the resurrected Savior and the forgiveness of sins. More than 5,000 people believed that day. The two apostles were arrested, questioned and again proclaimed the Gospel. As they faced the persecutors who wished to silence them, the evidence that they had been with Jesus was on display as they preached. This certainly impacted the council: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (v. 13).

ii. Marked by the power of the Holy Spirit

- Verse 13 says that the council saw these apostles as uneducated and common men. It was not, in fact, their own power that healed the man but rather the Holy Spirit empowering them. These two men were led by the Holy Spirit, and the evidence of following Jesus was the power displayed by the lame man's ability to stand next to them.

c. In Acts, we see the frontlines of the Gospel and faith in action. It is here in the first chapters of Acts that we find the church beginning to grow in the face of opposition. This is where the church in the Arabian Peninsula finds itself today.

2. Fierce Opposition (vv. 15–18)

a. Though God's power working in the apostles' lives could not be denied, the rulers and elders sought to silence them. As the council of leaders gathered, they

recognized the evidence that was continuing to spread to the people of Jerusalem. Here we see the active obedience of God's people bringing glory to God. The news about these Christians, with evident power from God, was spreading. In an attempt to silence them, the religious rulers charged Peter and John not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

b. Our text provides a picture of persecution. Persecution happens when a Christian or group of Christians live boldly for their faith and any kind of opponent (individual, community, government) sees that activity and desires to silence them. This is what we see in the Book of Acts and throughout the world today. When Christians are persecuted, they face two options: Be silent or continue.

    - It is right for us to pause and reflect on this reality. First, we ask the Holy Spirit to challenge us to live faithfully in our own context. Second, we should be overwhelmed by a passion to lift up our persecuted brothers and sisters in prayer. We pray that they will experience God's comfort in trials, see God open opportunities for evangelism, reach their persecutors with the gospel and have the strength to persevere in faith.

c. This is the power of the Gospel — it cannot be stopped. The plan of God cannot be thwarted. Every country in the world today has a Christian. While many more unreached and unengaged people groups need to hear the gospel, no government, radical extremist group or any other opposition has the ability to stop the power of the gospel and the plan of God.

3. Fearless Proclamation (vv. 19–21)

a. Peter and John stood before the leaders who crucified Jesus and are now threatening them, and they did not cower. They did not bend to appease the

opposition but remained fearless in their proclamation of the truth, so compelled by it that they were not able to remain silent. Those who have truly seen Christ and experienced his saving grace cannot but speak of Jesus.

- "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Think of what Peter and John had seen and heard. John saw Jesus turn water to wine. He saw him heal the sick, feed 5,000 with a child's lunch and walk on water. It was Peter who stepped out of a boat onto the water at Jesus' command and saw Jesus save him as he began to look away. They heard him preach. They were there for the Transfiguration. They heard Jesus call out to Lazarus, who was dead, and they saw him walk out of his grave. They saw him wash their feet, break bread with them and pray in the garden. They saw him betrayed and arrested. They saw him beaten and mocked. It was there at the cross that John saw the nails driven into his hands and feet. He stood there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and heard him say "It is finished" as he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. For all of this, they could not but speak of Jesus because they saw the empty tomb, heard his voice and felt his nail-scarred hands.

b. Like Peter and John, Bassam faces opposition that seeks to silence him. He remains faithful, fearlessly proclaims the truth of the Gospel to those in his life and has seen one family member come to Christ. Do we share a family resemblance with him? Bassam is our brother in Christ. He is bold in his proclamation of the Gospel. Are we?

c. Why do we fearlessly proclaim?

   i. Everything is for God's glory. Acts 4:21 says, "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done."

   ii. What can mere man do to us but bring us closer to our Creator?
   - Psalm 55:4
   - "You can kill us, but you cannot harm us." —Justin Martyr

CLOSING PRAYER (OPTIONAL):

Dear Almighty God, we thank you for your Word and the opportunity to see the bold and active faith of Peter and John. May we also have a faith that remains strong in the face of fierce opposition. Lord, we pray that it will be evident each day that we have been transformed by your grace. Lead us to those around us, burdening our hearts for our lost neighbours, and give us the courage to proclaim your truth to them. Lead us, like Bassam, to obedience at any cost. God, we lift up Bassam and other brothers and sisters like him in the Arabian Peninsula. We pray that you will be their sustainer in the midst of trials and that they will be encouraged to continue being your bold and active witnesses. We pray that more and more of their family members will come to faith in you through that witness. We entrust ourselves to you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.