

## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-03-2014 @ 0900

“How Far Will You Believe?”

Acts 4:1-4

### COME...NOW IS THE TIME TO WORSHIP!

Come...Now is the time to worship! Come! Now is the time to give your heart!  
Come...just as you are to worship! Come, just as you are before your God! Come!  
One day every tongue will confess: “You are God!” One day every knee will bow!  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those...who gladly choose You now!

#### Acts 4:1-4

“Peter and John were still speaking to the people when some priests, the officer in charge of the Temple guards, and some Sadducees arrived. They were annoyed because the two Apostles were teaching the people that Jesus had risen from death, which proved that the dead will rise to life. So they arrested them and put them in jail until the next day, since it was already late. But many who heard the Message believed; and the number grew to about five thousand.”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever desired to apply for a job, join a team or club, or accept a task, but changed your mind when you discovered all that might be required of you in order to “succeed”?
- Have you ever read about a “hero”, or listened to a “superstar” who had “risen to the top or the field”, wishing you could attain such status, but realizing you’d never pay the price they paid?
- As you consider your faith, from your point of view, how deeply is God committed to you? Isn’t an awareness of God’s Commitment to your eternal welfare a “spark” to your faith in God?

Peter, John, and the rest of the believers have been given a commission to carry the Good News into all the world. Suddenly, they are faced with arrest and jail...for testifying to God’s Truth! What an attention-getting object lesson! This Mission may involve a great deal more risk than was apparent in the first “in-rush” of the Spirit on Pentecost. They know well all that Christ endured in His Passion and Death; now they see that similar tests are possible on the road that is ahead of them. What about us? Do we see what’s involved in our witness as we take on the same Commission to carry forth the Good News of Jesus Christ? Most of us have not been thrown in jail for sharing the Good News of the Gospel. How might “arrest and jail time” change your mind about “being a Christian”? Today there are many threats to faith looming on the horizon. Newscasters inform us of nations in which Christians are being tried and tested for their faith in Christ. In our own nation, High School students are ordered to turn their t-shirts inside out to hide a Christian slogan, and school sports team members may not offer prayer before a game. Bible studies are forced off state college campuses. Military chaplains are forbidden to pray in Jesus’ name at “public ceremonies”, and chapels must be “religiously neutralized” following every service. So-called “political correctness” pushes worldly morals and secular ethics upon Christian organizations, threatening them with all kinds of legal actions, boycotts, or other “sanctions” if they do not comply. Believers! Are you ready to pick up your cross and follow Jesus? Are you ready to follow, even if “inconvenience” leads to *persecution*? How far will you believe “if push comes to shove”? God, grant us the Grace of Courageous Conviction. Help us “buck the system” when “the system” has turned its back on You! Strengthen us to go “all in” for Christ, even if it costs us all else we hold dear...family, friends, jobs, social standing, even basic “credibility”! Teach us to stand by You in the Spirit by which Your Son stands by us!

## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-04-2014 @ 0900

**“You Are Never Alone”**

Acts 4:5-10

### COME...NOW IS THE TIME TO WORSHIP!

Come...Now is the time to worship! Come! Now is the time to give your heart!  
Come...just as you are to worship! Come, just as you are before your God! Come!  
One day every tongue will confess: “You are God!” One day every knee will bow!  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those...who gladly choose You now!

#### Acts 4:5-10

“The next day, the Jewish leaders, the Elders, and the Teachers of the Law gathered in Jerusalem. They met with the High Priest Annas, and with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the others who belonged to the High Priest’s family. They made the Apostles stand before them and asked them, ‘How did you do this? What power do you have, or whose name did you use?’ Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, answered them, ‘Leaders of the People and Elders: if we are being questioned today about the good deed done to the lame man, and how he was healed, then you should all know, and all the people of Israel should know, that this man stands here before you completely well through the Power of the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – whom you crucified, and whom God raised from death!’”

#### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever had to go before a board of inquiry, panel of experts, or group of high-ranking, “powerful” individuals for any reason? Did you feel nervous? Alone? Powerless?
- Can you remember a time when you had studied hard for a test, or rehearsed your lines for an important interview, only to have all thought “slip away” at the critical moment?
- On any occasion in which your faith in God or your church affiliation was questioned, did you feel confident of your answers? Were you ready to “stand” for your beliefs?

Peter and John are now standing before the very same group that “forced the issue” on Jesus, and had Him killed. Peter and John are both very aware that “truth”, “facts”, or even innocence itself aren’t necessarily high on the priority lists of their opposition. This group is out to “cover their own six”, maintain their own “power base” and “comfort zone”, and eliminate anyone who would threaten their “establishment”. Peter and John can “hear death knocking at their door” in this interview. Their accusers are asking “loaded questions”, and “honest answers” will land the Apostles in a whole world of hurt. Then “anointing happens”! The Holy Spirit begins to stir within Peter, assuring him of the Presence and Power of God. No longer “alone”, Peter speaks the “Truth of God” with conviction, as the Holy Spirit imparts the words to say, and all the passion needed to speak them with confidence. (Can you remember a time when you were at a loss as to which way to go or what to say, when suddenly God showed up, and led you surely through your crisis?) The “worldly” are talented about “showing a good face”, appearing very formidable, and using all their wiles to silence God’s people. If we have “waited on the Lord” long enough to receive His Spirit, we have nothing to fear. God will “take our part”, and no weapons forged against us will stand! O God, grant us the Grace of True Wisdom. Give us patience enough to wait upon Your Will until awareness of Your nearness forges in us the Courage we need to go “all in” for You. When the “worldly” challenge us, as they all too often do, keep us ready to respond with courtesy as we are able, but with fidelity to the Love and Truth You have revealed in Your beloved Son, and shared in Your Spirit of Peace!

## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-05-2014 @ 0900

**“When You’re ‘in the Pressure Cooker’,  
Can Anyone Tell You’re a Companion of Jesus?”**

Acts 4:11-13

### COME...NOW IS THE TIME TO WORSHIP!

Come...Now is the time to worship! Come! Now is the time to give your heart!  
Come...just as you are to worship! Come, just as you are before your God! Come!  
One day every tongue will confess: “You are God!” One day every knee will bow!  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those...who gladly choose You now!

#### Acts 4:11-13

“Jesus is the One of whom the Scripture says, ‘The stone that you the builders despised turned out to be the most important of all.’ Salvation is to be found through Him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us.” The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were, and to learn that they were ordinary men of no education. They realized then that they had been companions of Jesus!

#### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever noticed (even been shocked) to realize you began taking on the characteristics, mannerisms, or “buzz-words” of those with whom you were “just hangin’ out”?
- Can you remember occasions when everything went “sour in a hurry”, opposition was all around you, and you “reacted” shamefully, displaying a most un-Christian attitude?
- Did you ever notice a “real believer” who “kept cool in the cooker” when everything in the situation looked desperate, but this disciple “trusted the Lord”, who justified that faith totally?

How much time do you spend in a regular week with Jesus Christ? Is it enough time to actually allow Christ to “rub off on you”? Is it enough time for you to begin to develop some of Jesus’ mannerisms, or maybe even using some of His “themes” or “key words”? Peter and John are in a “pressure cooker moment” here. Being questioned by the very ones who plotted and connived to have Jesus crucified, they are “standing their ground”, manifesting the same calm and assurance that Jesus displayed in His trial. How are they doing this? Luke has already answered this question. In the wake of that “Pentecost Morning”, the Anointing of Holy Spirit has “sealed” them as “God’s Own”, developing the very Character of Jesus Christ within these two individuals. Christ has become “their Cornerstone”, the very Foundation of their existence. Peter and John have become *children of God* through Christ’s amazing Work on the Cross, and now stand in His “Resurrection Power” with such boldness that their accusers literally “see Jesus in them”. (When people are dealing with you, can they tell that you have been a “companion of Jesus”? When you find yourself “in the pressure cooker of life”, and nothing appears to be going right, [or at least according to your plan], do you face it with the same calm assurance and peace that Jesus would?) If we let that Spirit of Truth into our hearts, those around us who watch us realize at some point we are companions of Jesus! If we “wait before the Lord” for our own Pentecost, we shall surely face our “pressure cooker times” in Strength, Ability, and Knowledge we receive from Christ. God, grant us the Grace of Discipleship, through which we can take on the Character and Mind of Your Son! Let us walk in Truth before You, and when challenged by the accusations of the “worldly” and “mean-spirited” opponents of Your Good News, empower us in Your Spirit to stand strong in His Life and Love! Help us live truly as “Companions of Jesus”!

## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-06-2014 @ 0900

**“Judge Which is Right in God’s Sight!”**

Acts 4:16-20

### COME...NOW IS THE TIME TO WORSHIP!

Come...Now is the time to worship! Come! Now is the time to give your heart!  
Come...just as you are to worship! Come, just as you are before your God! Come!  
One day every tongue will confess: “You are God!” One day every knee will bow!  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those...who gladly choose You now!

#### Acts 4:16-20

“What shall we do with these men?’ they asked. ‘Everyone in Jerusalem knows that this extraordinary miracle has been performed by them, and we cannot deny it. But to keep this matter from spreading any further among the people, let us warn these men never again to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus.’ So they called them back in, and told them that under no condition were they to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘You yourselves judge which is right in God’s sight – to obey you, or to obey God! For we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard.’”

### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Have you ever found yourself in a “prickly situation” in which “standing for God” or “speaking in His Name” would be most “unwelcome”? Did you bow to “worldly pressure” or “stand for God”?
- Have you ever witnessed an awesome “miracle of God” to which you would eagerly testify, until “someone respectable” told you to “keep quiet”? Did your heart feel “ready to explode”?
- What can you remember having “seen and heard” of God’s action in your life, (or the lives of those you know well)? How have those experiences emboldened your faith?

In today’s passage, Luke portrays a sector of our religious world that wants no part of Jesus Christ, or His Gospel, at all; these “holy experts” want every mention of Him silenced completely. So opposed are they to any message of Christ, they willingly ignore the indisputable miracle of the healed cripple from the Beautiful Gate. They see clearly that Peter and John boldly credit the awesome deed to the Power of the Name of Jesus, taking no credit for any merit or holiness of theirs. Though they admit the Power is real, they still want it to “go away” quietly, so they order the Apostles to stop all speech and teaching in the name of Jesus. Peter and John know that if they go against this group of leaders they may be signing their own death warrants. They are fully aware that, at the very least, they can be thrown into prison and beaten. (Does this sound at all familiar? In our own nation today, can we note a growing “anti-Christian” trend, in which Christians are accused of “hate speech”, other religions are explored in school classrooms, [all in the name of “tolerance”, of course,] and “freedom of speech” and “liberty of action” routinely redefine morality and ethical behavior.) When forbidden to speak or teach anything about Jesus, Peter and John reply, “You yourselves judge which is right in God’s sight – to obey you, or to obey God!” This is the same principle we need to apply today. As pressure mounts all around us to “get with the program”, and “keep our Christianity to ourselves”, we need to “take a new cue” from God’s own Word! God, grant us the Grace of Steadfast Faith! In the face of the “secular onslaught”, focus our attention on the Love and Fidelity our Savior revealed, and pours out anew from day to day! He went “all out” for us on the Cross; help us go “all in” willingly for love of Him! He is our “Beautiful Gate” to Eternity; fix our vision on Him, so we *live* all we teach of His Love!



## DEVOTIONAL TIME

11-07-2014 @ 0900

“What Is Your Prayer?”

Acts 4:23-30

### COME...NOW IS THE TIME TO WORSHIP!

Come...Now is the time to worship! Come! Now is the time to give your heart!  
Come...just as you are to worship! Come, just as you are before your God! Come!  
One day every tongue will confess: “You are God!” One day every knee will bow!  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those...who gladly choose You now!

#### Acts 4:23-30

“As soon as Peter and John were set free, they returned to their group, and told them what the Chief Priest and the Elders had said. When the believers heard it, they all joined together in prayer to God: ‘Master and Creator of heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is in them! By means of the Holy Spirit, You spoke through our ancestor David, Your servant, when he said, ‘Why were the Gentiles furious? Why did people make their useless plots? The kings of the earth prepared themselves, and the rulers met together against the Lord and His Messiah.’ ....And now, Lord, take notice of the threats they have made, and allow us, Your servants, to speak Your Message with all boldness. Reach out Your hand to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the Name of Your holy Servant, Jesus!’”

#### QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- Can you remember a “time of trial”, in which everything you did “went wrong”, and every way you went led to more strife and grief? Did this leave you feeling helpless and vulnerable?
- When “your world turns upside down”, do you immediately resort to prayer? Do you pray for deliverance *from* your problems, or for the strength to get *through* them?
- Do you believe God “takes notice of the threats” you face, and reaches out a sovereign and healing “hand” to produce “wonders and miracles” on your behalf?

When “leadership” has set itself at cross purposes to God’s revealed Will, believers need to “take on city hall”, however inconvenient, uncomfortable, or even dangerous things may get. Those who compose the “powers-that-be” can make “opposition” look (and feel) rather small and insignificant at times. When such “powers” align against disciples, the “half-hearted” can give way to outright terror. Believing that we need to take a stand for God, and testifying to our faith in God, is easy to claim in principle, but actually doing so is quite another matter. There is inherent risk in witnessing to Christ. Outwardly living our faith often involves daunting challenge, and even scary opposition. (What if they laugh at me? What if they ask me questions I can’t answer? What if they should threaten me with violence? What if I must face suspension, or loss of my job, jail time, or even death? That “ups the Seriousness Quotient”, doesn’t it?) Most of us have never really had to take a serious stand for our faith in this country. In fact, we have “traveled Easy Street” for so long most of us take our Faith for granted, because we have never had to fight for it. These early believers realize they are in “Spiritual Battle”! Rather than backing off, running away, or trembling with fear, they go to prayer. Pentecost has infused them with a new-found faith in God’s Presence and ability to work powerfully on their behalf; therefore, they take their case to Him in prayer. Notice how they ask God for boldness to deal with their situation, not to “bail them out”! God, grant us the Grace of Holy Boldness! Make us gracious but fervent “Speakers of the Message” Your Son has entrusted to us. You know the threats we face, (better than we do ourselves,) so strengthen us in Your Love and Fidelity. With Your Grace to lift us and sustain us, we can live and work as agents of Your Kingdom, regardless of opposition. Help us with Your holy Hand of Healing and keep us faithful to the Name we bear for love of Jesus!