

## “PBVCIS 2012”

Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 4:1-31 <sup>1</sup>

Please open your Bibles and look with me at Acts 4. This is truly an amazing story.

Peter, the disciple who denied Jesus three times because he was afraid, and John, the disciple “whom Jesus loved,” were in the Temple courts boldly preaching to all who would listen that Jesus’ resurrection had opened the pathway to God for us all. God confirmed the truth of their message by granting them the ability to perform miraculous acts; in this case, the famous healing of the lame man at the Temple gate. You remember that story, when Peter looked at the beggar and said, “*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk*” (Acts 3:6).

Because of this miracle, Peter and John were arrested, thrown in jail, and then hauled before the High Council the next morning. In answer to the angry question, “*By what power or what name did you do this?*” Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered:

*“Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being 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.*”

*“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

*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** (Acts 4:7-13). When the council commanded Peter and John *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus*, they replied, “*Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:18-19).*

After further threats, the council let Peter and John go. *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. . . . “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*

*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly* (Acts 4:23-31).

This really is an amazing story, and it illustrates the title of this message, about which you surely have at least a tiny bit of curiosity. The letters PBVCIS represent six characteristics I use to describe what I call “Great Commission Christians.” “Great Commission Christians” are persons whose lives give evidence of “*having been with Jesus.*” Such lives are **P**rayer-Filled, **B**ible-Centered, **V**irtuous, **C**ompassionate, **I**ntegrated, and **S**piritually Powerful.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on April 15, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> These characteristics are derived from Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (HarperOne, 2001).

Every one of those characteristics is illustrated in this story,<sup>3</sup> and I could easily spend time on each of them; but I want to use the story this morning as a backdrop for a slightly different trajectory. Our topic today is the Great Commission itself, which Nnamdi read earlier. These three sentences constitute Jesus' final instructions to His Disciples . . . and to us after them:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* (Matthew 28:16-20).

This Great Commission constitutes the “marching orders” of the Church; and Jesus expects us to be passionate about its accomplishment. “Passion” is a personal intensity that energizes and drives us. “Passion” is a spark that motivates us to action. “Passion” has to do with the very heartbeat of who we are and of what we truly care about. When we get close to our passion, we become more animated. We talk a little faster. We become more *alive*.

One of the best biblical examples of godly passion is the Apostle Paul, who said, *“I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace”* (Acts 20:24). **“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

*“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. **But one thing I do:** Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:10-14). Now that’s passion!

I have a good friend who is a modern-day Paul. We went to college together long ago, and since those days, he and his family have served as IMB missionaries, first in Malawi, then in Kenya, then in Somalia; and for the past fifteen years, they have circled the globe many times working with persecuted Christians in nearly seventy countries. I hope to have you meet them one day, but today, I want you to hear just a tiny part of their story. Because of the nature of their work, I’m going to call them Nick and Ruth . . . .

“How many of us who strive to follow Jesus today,” Nick wrote, “have ever wished we could have witnessed first-hand the kind of spiritual adventures and the **world-changing, resurrection-powered faith** experienced by Believers in the New Testament? I believe we can—and we don’t need a time machine to do it. We just have to look and listen to those faithfully living for Christ today in our world’s toughest places.

“When Ruth and I first headed for Africa with our boys almost thirty years ago, I was a young, naïve, Kentucky farm-boy who believed God was sending us around the world on a great adventure to tell people who Jesus was and explain what the Bible was all about. Today, I realize God allowed us go out into the world so we could find out who Jesus was, from people who really *knew* Him and actually *lived* the Word of God.

“I now know that when Ruth and I began this pilgrimage to understand persecution fifteen years ago, we were asking the wrong questions and seeking the wrong sort of answers. What we discovered—through God’s grace and with the help of hundreds of faithful people

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<sup>3</sup> Prayer-Filled (Acts 4:23-31); Bible-Centered (vv. 11, 25-26); Virtuous (vv. 19-20); Compassionate (vv. 8-9); Integrated/Congruent (vv. 13-14); Spiritually Powerful (vv. 8-12, 19-20, 31).

encountered on our journey—wasn't so much a strategy, method, or plan. What we discovered was an actual *Person*. **We found Jesus—very much alive and well in the 21st century,** revealed in the lives and words and resurrection faith of Believers in persecution who don't just live *for* Jesus, they live *with* Him every day.

“One of the most important things they taught me is that I needed a whole new perspective on persecution. For decades now, many concerned western believers have sought to rescue those spiritual brothers and sisters around the world who suffer because they choose to follow Jesus. Yet our pilgrimage among house churches in persecution has convinced me that God may actually want to use *them* to save *us* from the often debilitating, and sometimes spiritually-fatal, effects of our watered-down, powerless western faith.”

“*For most believers around the world,*” Nick writes, “*persecution is completely avoidable.* So when we ask, ‘Why do 80% of global followers of Jesus who actively practice their faith live in environments where persecution is the norm?’ the first and most basic answer is that they have given their lives to Jesus. The second contributing factor is that they have determined in their hearts that they will not keep Jesus to themselves.”

“Leave Jesus alone, don't seek or follow Him, and you will avoid the Number One cause of religious persecution in the world today. And even if you do become a believer in Christ, just keep your faith private and personal, and your chance of being persecuted for your new faith is practically nonexistent. Just leave Him alone. Keep Him to yourself. Persecution dies where there is no faith or no witness.

“One of the most important lessons I've learned from fellow believers in persecution is this: that they are just as free to share Jesus today in their countries of Somalia, Pakistan, or China as you and I are in the U.S. or any other democratic western nation. The issue is not one of political freedom. The issue is one of obedience.”

“More than nine out of every ten western church members will be born, raised, saved, baptized, married, and buried and *never once in their lifetimes* share their faith with another person. Perhaps the real question should not be ‘Why are others persecuted?’, but rather, **‘Why are we not?’**”

I look forward to the day when Nick can tell you such stories himself. And all this brings me back to Peter and John and to those early believers in Acts 4, as well as to the title of this sermon. Remember that those six letters, PBVCIS, represent the six characteristics of “Great Commission Christians,” persons whose lives are **P**rayer-Filled, **B**ible-Centered, **V**irtuous, **C**ompassionate, **I**ntegrated, and **S**piritually Powerful.

We'll look at each of these characteristics in more depth in the weeks to come. For this morning, though, I want you to remember the question with which Nick began. That question was, “How many of us who strive to follow Jesus today have ever wished we could have witnessed first-hand the kind of spiritual adventures and **the world-changing, resurrection-powered faith** experienced by Believers in the New Testament?”

“Resurrection-powered faith” is how I want to live my life, and I believe that's how you want to live your life, too. As we continue launching our life together as pastor and people, one of the first things we need to do is to renew our passion for living out the Great Commission, because **if we don't do that, nothing else we do matters very much.**

George Stadskev, a missionary in the Republic of Ivory Coast, told of an experience he had that underscores this point. George was involved in a construction project, trying to finish a building before the rainy season began. As he worked one day, a woman from

a distant village approached him and said, “I am told that you are a man of God”; and she insisted that he return with her to her village. George told her he’d be glad to come as soon as the building was finished. She said, “Then I will wait for you.” When a local man explained that what she meant by this was that she would live in George’s home with him until he was ready to make the journey, George decided to break away and go with her.

When he arrived at her village, George was introduced to a village elder, who asked him, “*Where have you been these many years?*” George said, “What do you mean?” The old man explained that many years earlier, someone in their village had gone to a neighboring town, where he had heard a Christian missionary. The man became a Christian, and the missionary told him to return to his village, to tell the people to burn their fetishes, and to build a house of God. “And soon,” the missionary said, “someone will come and tell you more about God’s love.”

The man returned to his village. The people burned their fetishes. They built a house of God. The old man said, “We waited and waited, but no one came. The house of God became old and fell down, so we built another, and we kept waiting.” He pointed to the little church building and said, “This is the fifth house of God we have built.”

George, knowing the materials and construction techniques of the area, knew that each church would have lasted about five years, and he thought to himself, “These people have been waiting for *more than twenty years* for the promise of the missionary to be fulfilled.”

George stayed for two more days, teaching them about God’s love in Jesus Christ, and he promised to return as soon as the building in the other village was finished. Before George left, though, the village elder insisted that George go with him to the cemetery. The old man pointed to grave after grave, saying over and over, “Where have you *been?* So many have *waited*. So many have *died*. **Where have you *been?***”

Well, I can tell you this: the people of that little village in the Republic of Ivory Coast are not the only ones who are waiting and yearning for someone to share with them the great love of God in Jesus Christ. There are many folk like that right here in Columbia. How long must they wait?<sup>4</sup>

*“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:29-31).*

**May it be so in our time, O Lord!**

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<sup>4</sup> Told by Dr. Tony Hopkins in “It’s Time to Have a Passion for the Great Commission,” a sermon delivered at the First Baptist Church of Greenwood, South Carolina.