

They Had Been with Jesus

by Harrison Conley

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If you have your Bible this morning, you can preemptively go to Acts 4. We're going to get there in just a moment. We've just come out of nine weeks of teaching through the book of Colossians, and I hope you enjoyed that series. I know it was very enriching for me, but this morning, I want to share a message with you that's going to be a little bit different. What I mean by that is, normally, I would get up here and teach, and we sort of go line by line, verse by verse. This morning, I want to share with you something that God has put in my heart. You're going to see my bleeding heart a little bit this morning, and this message has a real sense of timing to it. This message has a real sense of urgency in it. Some of the things I say today, I just want to forewarn you, may push you a little bit. They may challenge you a little bit, but I believe that this is what God has for me to say. As I began to pray and say, "God, what is it that You want me to share with the people? What is it that You want me to share with our church?" It started with a word. The word was boldness, but how many know oftentimes, when God says something to you, you don't get the full message right away?

The longer you sit, the more you see, the more you begin to ponder, and you begin to realize that what God is saying to you is actually layered like an onion. You begin to remove the layers, and you get closer and closer to the heart of what God is actually trying to say. God begins to enhance that message. Such is the case today. We started with the word boldness, and then that word also morphed into the word holiness. It's interesting to me because boldness and holiness go hand in hand. It's holiness that actually gives boldness its weight and authority. I want to talk about those two words today, but I want to talk to them under the umbrella and under the covering of Acts 4:13 in this statement. The statement is this, "They realized that they had been with Jesus." Now, if you've called Cottonwood home for any length of time, you've probably heard me say from this pulpit, "Cottonwood, we are Jesus people." I haven't said that in a while. I think maybe we need to get back to saying that because it's more than just a clever moniker that's meant to elicit a response from the congregation.

For me, that phrase is actually a creed. It's a conviction as to what and who the church is supposed to be, and I don't want us to lose that. We are Jesus people. My prayer is that when anyone would come in contact with us, there would be no doubt. They would realize and recognize that each and every one of us have been with Jesus. Acts 4. Let me give you some context before we read. If you were to actually back up into Acts 3, what you'll find is that the New Testament Church, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, has begun to take off. People are getting saved, people are getting baptized, people are getting healed, and people are getting disciplined. It's an amazing move of God. We have these characters, Peter and John. They're two of the key leaders in this unprecedented move of God. In Acts 3, there's actually this story where Peter and John are on their way to the temple to pray, and I love that the text actually says, "As was their custom." I want to just pause there because Christians should be men and women of prayer. Peter and John were no strangers to the place of prayer. They were on their way to pray, as was their custom, and as they came, they saw a lame man waiting at the gate. He is begging for financial charity, and we know the story. Peter stops, looks at the man, and he says, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have, I give unto you in the name of Jesus Christ. Get up and walk." The man went walking, leaping, and praising God.

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Now, this obviously caused quite a commotion. A large crowd gathers around, and Peter takes advantage of the moment. He begins to preach about Jesus and the resurrection. Now, the religious leaders, the Pharisees who were there that day, were greatly disturbed by this. They were upset about this. They actually used the temple guard and arrested Peter and John. They spend the night in jail, and the next morning, they are brought before the religious leaders for questioning about the healing of this lame man and for their preaching. The Pharisees say to them, "By what power, by what name, or by what authority have you done this?" I love that the Scripture says, "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit." Pause there. "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit." Church, shame on us if we think that we can live out this life and accomplish the call of God on our lives without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a luxury; the Holy Spirit is a necessity. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly begins to declare the name and the message of Jesus. We come to Acts 4:13 NKJV says this. "Now, when they," the religious leaders, "When they saw the boldness," if you got a pen, maybe just highlight that phrase.

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

First, a couple of observations. What a change divine grace can make in a man and in a short amount of time. I think about Peter in our story here. Just a few days prior, when Jesus had been arrested and brought before the court, the Bible says that Peter followed Him at a distance, and he sat outside warming his hands by the fire. When he was confronted about knowing Jesus, he used oaths, swearing, and lies to deny that he ever knew Jesus. Now, fast forward a few days, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we see Peter and John both boldly declaring the gospel in the name of Jesus. What a change divine grace can make in the life of a person. Is anybody else grateful for the grace of God? They are preaching with boldness, and it didn't take long for these religious rulers to figure out what the source of that boldness was. The Scripture says it didn't come from a formal education, and it didn't come from training, at least in the normal sense. They were trained in the school of Jesus. They were disciples by Jesus, but these men were fishermen by trade. Their education had been the knowledge of the tides and the sea. They were up to date with how to catch fish. The boldness that they preached with didn't come from the confidence and self-sufficiency of a learned academic head knowledge, but rather, it came from the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Their courage didn't come from their position in society. These men were not high class. They were not the social media influencers of their day. They were men of no official title, rank, or station. In the eyes of the religious elite, these men, Peter and John, were uneducated. They were unpolished and uncultured, yet they were bold in their faith. The religious leaders, seeing this, came to the right conclusion as to the source of this boldness and this power, and they realized that they had been with Jesus.

That statement has been the prayer I've been praying over my own life. It's the prayer that I've been praying over our staff. It's the prayer that I've been praying over our church. It's the prayer that I've been praying over the body of Christ at large, that when people come in contact with us, be it friends, be it neighbors, be it even enemies, whoever would see us, look at us, or come in contact with us, they would see a resemblance of Jesus. That our lives would be just as the Apostle Paul would write of in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. Paul wrote and said, "May our lives be living Epistles, known and read by all men, an Epistle of Christ, not written with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God. Not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of flesh, on the tablets of our heart."

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What Paul is saying is that as believers, our lives should have a striking resemblance to Christ, that whoever would see us, hear us, and spend time with us would supernaturally come in contact with the Savior. We're His living epistles or His living biography, as it was. Jesus should be revealed in our words. Jesus should be felt in our demeanor. Jesus should be seen in our actions. We are His living epistles, and of course, that's not to say that any one of us is going to have a perfect exhibition of all the features and exact likenesses of Jesus. We're not going to be His perfect representation. Because as long as we're on this planet sucking oxygen, as long as there is a war on the inside of us between our old man and our new nature, being the exact likeness of Christ probably isn't a reality. However, that shouldn't dissuade us or diminish us in our desire to pursue becoming more like Jesus. The deepest cry of our hearts should be that every day, forgetting what lies behind, I press forward to the upward call of God on my life into a greater level of maturation, into the image of Jesus. Are you hearing me this morning and understanding what I'm trying to say?

What I want to do is give us a couple of areas in which we need to pursue becoming more like Jesus. Here are the two words again: boldness and holiness. This is really the heart of what I want to share with us today. These two areas specifically, I believe God is asking us, as a church, to grow in when it comes to becoming more like Jesus. This is the first one, boldness. We need to be like Jesus in His boldness. Do you remember Jesus' first sermon? It was a short one, but it was a bold one. It went like this, "Repent. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Do you remember in Luke 4, when Jesus goes into His hometown? He goes into Nazareth. He goes into the synagogue. He gets handed the scroll. He opens up to that part in Isaiah where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. He's anointing Me to preach the gospel to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Do you remember that? Then He turns to His hometown crowd. He turns to the friends that He grew up with, and He says, "Today, that Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." It's like a drop-the-scroll moment, right? Boldness. Then, Jesus, as He stepped into His earthly ministry, He never compromised or watered down the truth of the Kingdom. He knew not the fear of man. He trembled at no one. At one point, I remember Him writing and telling the Pharisees, "Hey, you are of your father, the devil." He told the Pharisees, "You are like whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones." In other words, you have it all together on the outside, but inwardly you're dead, and you are lost in your sin.

See, Jesus wasn't caught up in being esteemed by men. He lived on mission. He boldly took on demons and demoniacs. He regularly disrupted social norms. He disciplined fishermen. He touched the leper. He ate with tax collectors. He ministered to the black sheep of society. In boldness, He told the lame to get up and walk. He told the blind to open their eyes and see. He told the dead to get up and come forth. He told the wind and the waves, "Be quiet and be still." Even to the end, Jesus boldly laid down His life, not for His friends, but for His enemies, for the joy that was set before Him. He endured the cross, despising the shame, and He defeated once and for all hell, death, and the grave. My Jesus, He's a bold one. What was the source of His boldness? It wasn't just the fact that He could do these miraculous works. For Jesus, the boldness was a byproduct of knowing His identity. He knew who He was, and He knew the authority that He possessed. In John 3, Jesus would say, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand." That phrase All things in the Greek, do you know what it means? All things. It means "not one thing is missing." Jesus understood His authority. The Father has given Him all things. In post-resurrection, we see Jesus getting ready to ascend back into heaven. He's there on the mountain with His disciples, and He gives them the great commission. He says to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." He says, "Now, you go therefore in My name, go therefore in My power, go therefore in My

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authority, and carry on the mission of the gospel.” As His disciples today, we carry that same mantle. We carry that same authority.

The apostle Paul would say it like this in 2 Corinthians 5, that we are Christ’s ambassadors here in the earth. As His ambassadors, may we be like our Savior in His boldness. May it become a greater part of our identity, and may we allow it to actually instruct our actions. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and of a sound mind.” Hear me. The Church of Jesus Christ should be the boldest entity on the face of the planet. Proverbs 28:1 says, “The righteous,” those who are in Christ, “the righteous are bold as a lion.” Listen to me. Right now, the earth is longing for boldness. The earth is longing for truth. Think about our current reality. People right now are longing for someone to boldly proclaim that truth and not back away from it. People are desperate for light right now, light amidst the darkness. They’re desperate for clarity amongst the chaos. They’re longing for someone to be courageous enough to stand for the truth, hold the line, and not bend to the whims of society. I’m telling you of anybody, it should be us. It should be the Church of Jesus Christ.

When we as the Church, capital C, when we as the Church preach and present a tame and watered-down version of the gospel, when we don’t preach boldly because we’re worried about offending people and because we want to be known as inclusionary, what we’re actually doing is undermining God’s plan and His authority. Which by the way, both of those things have been revealed to us through Christ, through the Scriptures, and through the Apostles. When we don’t preach or when we edit parts of God’s Word that we think are offensive or that we don’t like, or that we don’t agree with, or that cost us something, what we’ve actually done is replace God’s authority with our own authorities, as if we know better than God. Hear me. A woke, edited, watered-down, politically correct version of the gospel is not the gospel at all.

Now, hear my heart. Am I saying that the Church shouldn’t be inclusive? Certainly not. The Church 100% needs to be inclusive. Look at the life and ministry of Jesus. He regularly interacted with and spent time with the ill repute of society. Here’s the caveat. It was always the sinner that came away changed, not Jesus. Listen to me, the Church, capital C, the Church should always be open to sinners. The moment we close our doors to sinners is the moment there is no one to fill this space, including the pastor. The Church should always be open to sinners, but the Church should never be a place that encourages people to continue in their sin. Our job as believers is to lead others to Jesus and to help turn them away from their sins. Certainly, not to embrace their sin or to affirm their sin. Unfortunately, over the last few decades, the Church, at least in America, has not functioned the way that she was intended to function. We’ve been more concerned with offending people than offending God. We forget that the message of the gospel and that the call of Jesus is by nature radical, counter-cultural, and offensive to worldly sensibilities. The apostle Paul told us in Galatians 5 that the message of the cross is offensive. He said, “It’s foolishness to those who are perishing.” The apostle Peter, in a similar fashion, 1 Peter 2, would say it like this, “The message of the gospel is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” Jesus Himself said that we shouldn’t be surprised when the world hates us because we belong to Him. He said, “The world hated Me first.”

Here’s the point. It’s time for the Church to find its true identity again. We are supposed to be the pillar of truth in the earth. The pillar of truth that’s planted right there at that intersection of the broad highway called destruction in that narrow road called life, and we’re planted there to boldly plead with people, be reconciled to God, bold and unafraid of the wrath of culture. When I consider that, I’m reminded of an Old Testament story, the one that’s found in 1 Kings 22, about Micaiah, the Prophet. The story goes like this. Ahab, who is the King of the northern kingdom, Israel, gets in contact with Jehoshaphat, who is the King of the southern kingdom,

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Judah. He says, "Hey, will you fight with me against the king of Syria? I want to get back a piece of land that used to belong to me." Jehoshaphat agrees under one condition, and that condition is that they would first consult the Word of the Lord. Ahab gathers to himself all of his professional prophets. These professional prophets are the ones who had learned that in order to keep their job, they would only say and prophesy what the king wanted to hear. If Ahab the King is a picture of culture, perhaps these professional prophets are a picture of some in Christian leadership today. They prophesy in favor of going to war, but it doesn't sit well with Jehoshaphat. He asks the question, and says, "Is there still not a prophet of God here in the land?" Ahab's response to this is telling, and honestly, it's reflective of the world and human nature's response to the truth and to the Word of God. Ahab says, "Yes, there's still one man, but I hate him. I hate him because he doesn't prophesy good concerning me, only evil. That's Micaiah the prophet." Some of these professional prophets go to find him and to bring him before the kings. They say to him, "You better prophesy just as we have prophesied. You better say only good concerning the King." I love Micaiah's response. It puts courage into my soul. He says, "As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak."

That's the boldness that believers and the Church should be known for, that whatever God says, whatever God has already said in His Word, that we will speak it. Now, keep in mind that boldness is not an excuse to be rude, and boldness is not an excuse to lack empathy. We do everything we do in a spirit of love and humility, but we don't compromise on the truth. We certainly don't play hermeneutical gymnastics to make the Word of God say something that it doesn't say. Boldness must be tempered with love. Just like truth needs grace, boldness needs love because the aim is to pierce people's hearts, not bruise their hearts. This has been one of my greatest prayers this year. Prayer over myself and a prayer over you that we would have the courage to speak the truth, stand in the truth, and remain in the truth even when the truth is unpopular. That we would live bold, love bold, pray bold, believe bold, and speak bold, even if it costs us something. I pray that as believers, we'd speak the truth about God, about man, and about sin. I pray that we would tell the truth about time, about eternity, about heaven, and about hell and that we would speak the truth in love, about creation, about sexuality, about gender, about righteousness, about life, about death, and the afterlife. That as the Lord lives, whatever He says, we will also say, even if it costs us everything. It's easy to say Amen on a Sunday, but is it easy to say Amen when it costs us something?

In the 16th century, there was an English preacher and reformer named Hugh Latimer. He was brought before King Henry VIII to preach, but he was warned before he preached to consider his words wisely. He was told that King Henry had the power to throw him in prison or even to take his life. I love Hugh Latimer's response. He said, "Yes, the King does have the power to throw me in prison. He does have the power to take my life, but I stand before an even greater King. Before that King, both I and Henry will one day have to stand and give an account of our lives. He has the power to cast us into hell." History tells us that Hugh Latimer preached boldly that day but that his bold preaching would eventually cost him his life. Later on, he would be martyred and burned at the stake by Henry's daughter, Queen Mary. Now, anytime I go to Long Beach Harbor and see the Queen Mary, I think differently of. If you were to read in Fox's Book of Martyrs, it actually records Hugh Latimer's last words. He was there at the stake next to a man named Mr. Ridley, and as they began to light the pyres beneath them, he said to Mr. Ridley, "Be of good cheer. We shall this day, by the grace of God, light up such a candle in England that shall never be put out." Boldness. Look, I hope it never comes to that. I think we'd be ignorant to think that boldness for the kingdom of God is not going to cost us something. We'd be ignorant to think it's not going to put a target on our back.

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I was just reading within the last month or two about an English street preacher who was arrested on the street for preaching a biblical viewpoint about the LGBTQ community. Just a couple of weeks ago, I read about a Christian in Malta who had converted from a gay lifestyle, and he had been interviewed on the radio. He wasn't even trying to proselytize. He was just telling his story about how God had rescued him out of that lifestyle, and he got arrested for hate speech. During COVID, there was a Canadian pastor who got jailed multiple times because he refused to close his church. I was reading just two weeks ago about a priest in Birmingham, England, who was arrested for praying outside of a closed abortion center. Listen, I don't say those things to scare you, but I say them to prepare you because the world is hostile to our faith. The world is hostile to the truth, and the easiest thing to do would be for us to put our heads in the sand, and not make any waves. Preach a lukewarm, tame gospel that's void of all conviction and authority, this apoplectic version of godliness, but void of all power. I pray that as we see the day of Jesus' return approaching, that each and every one of us would boldly contend for the faith, and then we'd have the courage to speak the truth, live in truth, and remain in the truth.

How are we doing? I realize that the last few minutes have been intense. Maybe you hear that, and you're like, "Yes, I'm all in. I get that. I believe that, but what does this look like in my life? I'm not in front of people. I'm not a speaker. My voice isn't amplified through a microphone. I'm not in the spotlight. My life seems like it's under the radar a little bit. What does boldness look like for me?" I would say that boldness for you looks like simple and radical obedience. Stepping out and obeying what the Holy Spirit is asking you to do when you don't know what the result will be. It could be something radical. It could be a life-altering decision, like moving your family halfway across the country. I know a thing or two about that. It could be as simple as obeying the Holy Spirit when He gives you a word of knowledge for your barista at Starbucks or obeying the Holy Spirit when He puts another parent who's on the kid's baseball team on your heart and says, "I want you to pray for them." It could be as simple as you not backing away from your faith when you're asked about it at work. We don't have to overcomplicate this thing. God is looking for obedience, and in our day and age, it takes boldness and it takes courage to obey. Let's live bold, love bold, pray bold, believe bold, and speak bold. Let's be like Christ in His boldness, but let's also intend to be like Christ in His Holiness. You see, boldness and holiness have to go hand in hand. Throughout the years, I've known some very bold people in ministry, people who had incredible platforms, people who had huge footprints of influence around the world, some that I've known personally, and others I've known from afar. Unfortunately, some of these guys, although they were incredibly bold on the stage, they lost their platforms and their ministries because, behind the scenes, they were radically deficient in the area of holiness. Its holiness that gives boldness its validity, and its authority.

Think about Jesus, our Savior. He preached, and He lived with great authority and boldness. Why? How? Because underneath that boldness, He could back it up with divine holiness. As believers, we need to strive to look and act more like Jesus when it comes to this area. Peter would write to the church and remind us of what God had commanded the people, that we are to be holy as He is holy. When it comes to the Christian life, the pursuit of holiness is not an option; it's a command. Paul would write to his young protégé Timothy. Second Timothy 2:19 says, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ, let them depart from iniquity, and have no part with sin." We know this. Most of us, I would venture to say, believe this and want to pursue this in our lives. We desire to embody holiness, but how quick and how often are we apt to compartmentalize different areas of our lives? We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. Some of us are really good when it comes to that Sunday box. We check it. We pull out that Sunday drawer, and out comes our Sunday best. We know how to be holy when we're in church, but the moment we leave and head home, we go back into that Sunday box, and the

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holiness filter comes off. Hear me, Church. We're supposed to be different. We're supposed to be holy and set apart. We're supposed to be in the world but not of the world. We're supposed to look, think, and act like Christ, different than the world. Listen, we're supposed to act and look like Christ whether we're at church or not. Our values and our actions are supposed to be set apart. We're a royal priesthood, a holy nation. As believers, we think, believe, and act differently when it comes to things like money, sexuality, sobriety, or even the words that come out of our mouths.

As the Psalmist would declare, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be holy and pleasing and acceptable in your sight, oh Lord." Our values inform our actions. Our lifestyle should be different than the world around us. We should have lives that are above reproach. We're to be holy like He is holy. Now, is that a call to sinless perfection? No, of course not. "We carry this treasure in earthen vessels," the Apostle Paul would say. This is a call to grow in our maturity. If I'm not growing in my Christian maturity, if I'm not seeing progress in my life, if my life still looks like it used to, if I still long to do, and if I still long to engage in the things that the world engages in or if I make excuses to validate and vindicate my worldly thinking or behavior, then maybe I need to take a long hard look in the mirror. Get with God, and get with godly accountability because, if nothing else, I need to strive for holiness. That way, when people see me, hear my words, or come in contact with me, they'd walk away going, "Man, that guy has been with Jesus." Now, why is holiness so important? Let me give you three reasons, and then we're going to wrap this up. Three reasons why holiness is important. Number one: holiness matters because one day, we're going to have to stand before Jesus and give an account of our lives.

I was just reading this the other day in Matthew. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says, 'Lord, Lord' is going to inherit the Kingdom." When Jesus returns, He's going to gather together the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares. Sheep and goats are similar. They graze side by side. Wheat and tares grow side by side, yet they are intrinsically different. The Bible says that at Jesus' joyful return, there is going to be this amazing party, but there's going to be some who aren't prepared, and that when they finally figure out what's going on, they're going to come knock at the door and they're going to say, "Lord, Lord, let us in. We know You." To which Jesus is going to respond, "But I never knew you." Holiness matters because one day, we're going to have to stand before Jesus, and we're going to have to give an account of our lives.

The great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said this on being like Christ. He said, "Use your sanctified imaginations with me. For at heaven's gate, there sits an angel who admits no one who has not the same features as our adorable Lord. There comes a man with a crown upon his head. 'Yes,' he says, 'thou has a crown, it is true, but crowns are not the medium of access here.' Another approaches dressed in robes of state and the gown of learning, 'Yes,' says the angel. 'It may be good, but gowns and learning are not the marks that shall admit you here.' Another advances, fair and beautiful. 'Yes,' says the angel, 'that might please on earth but beauty is not wanted here.' There comes another who is heralded by fame and prefaced by the blast of the clamor of mankind. 'But,' sayeth angel, 'it is well with man but you have no right to enter here.' Then appears another, poor he may have been, illiterate he may have been, but the angel looks at him, smiles, and says, 'It's Christ again. A second edition of Jesus Christ is there. Come in. Come in eternal glory thou shall win, thou art like Christ in heaven, thou shall sit because thou art like Him.'" He says, "If you're like Christ, you are of Christ and shall be with Christ, but if you're unlike Him, you have no portion in the great inheritance." Holiness matters because one day we're going to have to stand before Jesus.

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Here's the second reason why holiness matters. It matters because we represent Christ on the earth because we are His witnesses and His ambassadors. Paul says, "We've been given the ministry of reconciliation as though God were pleading through us, 'Reconcile to God.'" Here's the question. If our lives don't look any different than the world around us, people are going to go, "Why do I need to be reconciled? I can't be that bad if my life looks just like your life." Then, at that point, what good is our witness? I can't tell you over the last 10 years how many people I've talked to who have walked away from their faith, who have deconstructed their faith because they got hurt by an imperfect Jesus follower. I can't tell you how many of my friends, as pastors, have had moral failings or fallen from grace. Listen, the Church of Jesus Christ doesn't need any more black eyes. No, we need to be holy like He is holy. We need to look and think like Jesus, in His humility, and say to those around us, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Here's the third reason why holiness matters. Revival will not come without holiness. The earth needs a reviving. The earth needs a time of latter rain, one final end-time harvest. Listen, there is nothing political that can fix what's broken in our nation. The only thing that can fix what is going on in our nation and around the world is if God, by His Holy Spirit, just decides to sit on this place. We need revival, but it will not come without holiness. Every revival throughout history has been marked by a conviction of sin and a repentance of sin, by a turning back to God.

Isaiah 35 talks about what God wants to do. It talks about revival. It says this, "The eyes of the blind shall be opened. The ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. The lame shall leap like a deer. The tongue of the dumb shall sing. For water shall burst forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land spring of water. A highway shall be there, and a road. It shall be called the highway of holiness." Listen, the road that we take to move us into a place called revival is holiness. There can be no reviving without holiness. I've shared this before, but the Welsh revival at the turn of the 20th century, in the early 1900s, they say the spark that started the Welsh revival was a man named Evan Roberts. He literally turned the nation of Wales on its head. Hundreds of thousands of people came to Christ, but Evan Roberts was a normal man. He wasn't even a preacher. He was an untrained, uneducated blacksmith, but he prayed a simple prayer. The prayer went like this, "Bend me, Lord. Bend me." I picture him there in his blacksmith shop with his piece of iron in the fire, getting it red hot and then putting it to the anvil and hitting it with his hammer and bending that piece of metal to his will. As he was doing that, he was praying, "Oh Lord God, do that with my heart. Bend me." I believe right now, across the earth, by the Spirit of God, He is fanning into flame, and He is bringing once again people's hearts red hot towards the gospel. May our prayer as believers be, "Bend me, Lord. Make me holy like You are holy. Don't let me compromise. Don't let me be satisfied to stay where I am in my relationship with You. May I grow and become more like Christ."

How do we grow in our boldness and in our holiness? We've now come full circle. We come back to where we started. Do you want to grow in boldness? Do you want to grow in holiness? You better be with Jesus. They had been with Jesus. Where do I find Jesus? You find Him here in the place of community. Where do I find Jesus? You find Him in His Word. Where do I find Jesus? You find Him in the place of worship. Where do I find Jesus? I find Him in the place of prayer. Where do I find Jesus? I find Him in the place of stillness. "Be still, and know that I'm God." One of my heroes in the faith is a guy named Henri Nouwen. He is a Dutch priest. He wrote about how Jesus would often go away to a deserted place and spend time with the Father. Every time I would read about that in the Scriptures, I always thought Jesus would go away so that He could recharge His batteries. So He could go back with a full tank and do ministry again, but Henri Nouwen takes a different perspective. He said Jesus pulled away, and He went to an isolated place to be with the Father, not to recharge His batteries for ministry, but because that was His ministry. To love God with all of His heart, all of His soul, and all of His

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mind. Guys, that's the first commandment: to love the Lord our God and to love Him with all that we are and with all that we have. We grow in becoming like Him. We grow in our boldness. We grow in our holiness when we spend unhurried time in His presence, unhurried time. But unhurried in our day and age almost seems unheard of. We're so busy. We have so much to do. There are so many distractions and so many things clamoring for our attention. When was the last time you got still and just went to be with God? To simply be with God? Not to get anything from Him, but just to be with Him. Not to come with our list. There is time for that, but to simply just sit in His presence. In our busy world, we need unhurried time in His presence.

Sometimes, I think that looks like sacrifice. Maybe it means for some of us to get up an hour early, an hour before anybody else is up, before the kids are up. Before we have to make lunches for school, before we have to make sure they have all their schoolwork together before we go and drive in traffic to get to our job. We get up an hour early, and we just sit and say, "Jesus, teach me to be like You. We just say, "Thank You. Thank You for Your love. Thank You for Your presence." Maybe for some of us, the morning is not realistic. So maybe it looks like once everybody has gone to bed, you just stay up for an hour, and instead of binging the next Netflix series, you grab that guitar, and you play the three chords that you know, and you make up your own song. You say, "Jesus, I don't want anything from You. Right now, I just want to tell You I love You." Just sit in His presence, unhurried time in His presence.

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