

INTRODUCTION

Some of you may have heard the tale about an eagle that thought it was a chicken. Once there was a baby eagle fell off from its nest. A farmer passed by, picked the little bird up and placed it in his chicken coop. The eagle grew up doing what chickens do. It lived like a chicken, and even made sound like one. A naturalist heard the story about this special chicken. He went to the farm to check things out. Indeed, the eagle walked like a chicken and it pecked on the ground like a chicken. The farmer explained: “That bird is trained to be a chicken and it believes it is one too.” The scientist was not convinced. The bird was born as an eagle and it has the heart of an eagle inside. He put the bird on his arm and said to it: “You are a king in the sky. Now fly!” The eagle looked at the man and glanced at its chicken friends. It hopped down onto the ground and continued to behave like a chicken. After all, that was a safe and comfortable life it knew. The next day, the man took the eagle to the mountain top. The bird could no longer see the chicken pen. The scientist pointed his finger to the sky and said: “Stretch your wings and soar!” This time the big bird flapped its massive wings. Slowly but surely, it took off and flew into the air. The Bible says those who wait on the Lord will soar like eagles. You may feel like a chicken and people treat you like a chicken. But God wants you to fly like an eagle. No, it is not for your sake but for the sake of God’s Kingdom. We celebrate Easter today. We heard the reading of the Scriptures earlier about the resurrection account. Some women went to the burial site of Jesus. They noticed that someone had moved the huge stone that sealed the tomb. Jesus’ body was missing. An angel appeared to the ladies, telling them to report to the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. On their way back, they met the resurrected Jesus. Afterward, the Lord also appeared to the disciples. Besides all those eye-witnesses, there are also countless of people who testify Jesus’ resurrection. That include you and I who claim Jesus as our Savior and Lord. Just like the first century believers, our lives have been changed by the resurrection power of Jesus. What does Easter mean to you today? God calls us to witness the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in us. Let me fill you in with what happened before Acts chapter 4. Jesus had gone back to heaven. The disciples obeyed Jesus’ instructions and stayed in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. On the day of the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended into the hearts of the believers. Peter seized the opportunity and preached to the crowd that Jesus was the Christ who died and rose again. Three thousand people believed. Thus, the first Christian church was established and it grew rapidly. Days later, Peter and John performed a miracle to heal a crippled man. People were amazed. Once again, Peter turned the incident into an evangelistic meeting. A lot of people put their trust in Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders heard of the commotion. They went to the scene and arrested Peter and John. What happened next was a dialogue between the two apostles and the religious leaders. We see a sharp contrast between those two groups of people.

EXPLANATION

1. 宗教領袖無能 The Religious Leaders Were Clueless

The Jewish religious leaders were clueless when facing the ever-growing Christian church. Read the description in **verse 2**: They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. Those leaders thought that with the

death of Jesus the hype of this new religious movement should come to an end. Then they heard the news that Jesus rose from the dead as He prophesied. People actually met Him! Also, His followers were all the more zealous to preach that Jesus was the Christ. The number of believers increased instead of decreased. It is like when you try to uproot a dandelion from your yard, you accidentally spread hundreds of seeds into the air. The newly formed church surely expanded like weeds. After Peter and John spent a night in jail, they were interrogated by the Jewish rulers. They asked the two apostles by what power or what name they healed the patient. Essentially, they were asking the apostles who gave them the authority to perform the miracle. Peter answered in [verse 10](#): “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.” Do you hear that? Peter convicted the leaders for nailing Jesus to the cross. Wow! That was bold. Was Peter not aware that the rulers could crucify him too? The leaders were speechless because they knew in their hearts that they were guilty of sending an innocent man to death. Continue to read [verse 13](#): 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. There are two undeniable facts. First, Peter and John were not afraid of the religious leaders. Second, the two apostles did perform a miracle to cure the crippled man. How could the leaders explain all that? They were clueless. The only connection they could see was that Peter and John were followers of Jesus. However, the rulers refused to admit that Jesus was God. But if Jesus was not God then how could He come back to life, and where did the disciples derive their healing power from? The leaders got back to square one: who was this Jesus? The religious leader did not know how to handle this new religion. All they could do was to warn Peter and John not to preach about Jesus anymore. But those church leaders ignored the order. Look at [Acts 5:12](#) – The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. The disciples were encouraged to see that God’s power was with them. The citizens of Jerusalem witnessed that too. You will be fired up when God blesses a new ministry you started with effectiveness. You receive confirmation from God that you are doing the right things. Back to the story. The High Priest and the religious party got mad. They arrested the disciples a second time. They even pondered on killing the disciples. Then a respected teacher named Gamaliel stood up and gave his advice. He quoted two previous incidents where rebels gathered some people trying to overthrow the Romans. But after the leaders were killed, their followers disappeared. Following the same logic, Gamaliel shared his opinion in [Acts 5:38-39](#) – 38 ... “Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” Finally, a wise guy learned the lesson. If what Jesus and His disciples did were from God, then nothing could stop them. The religious leaders would be looking for trouble if they tried to intervene the power and plan of God. The leaders thus beat up the disciples, threatened them again and released them. But the disciples continued to spread the gospel. The Jewish leaders could not deny that the disciples displayed authority because they had been with Jesus. Nowadays, God does not give us the gift to perform miracle. But can the people around us notice that we are different because we have been with Jesus? If God is living in us then there must be changes. The two apostles healed the disabled man and made him walk again. We were dead in sins and the same power that raised Jesus from the dead also gives us a new life. Do not live like a dead person! The church will be weak if we are weak. Sometimes we treat our faith like a hobby. Some people go fishing or shopping on Sunday, and we just attend

church. Even when we are inside the church building, we often treat our meetings like social gatherings. Our physical bodies are here but our hearts are elsewhere. Do we truly believe that every single word in the Bible is God's truth, so much so that we love it, read it and obey it? Or do we buy into the lie that this book is just an ancient fairy tale and it is irrelevant to our modern life? Brothers and sisters: it is time to let the world see the resurrection power of God working in our lives. People may label us naïve, dumb and crazy. But we show them that we are with Jesus. Perhaps you were a selfish person but God changed you and gave you a compassionate heart to care for others. Perhaps you used to live with anxiety about the future but God granted you peace and joy. It could also be the way you speak, the way you deal with a demanding boss or the value you instill to your children. Let people see God living in you because you believe in a living God. They may be skeptical about your faith but they cannot help but wonder: "I don't know what you believe. But your religion indeed makes you a better person." People may be clueless about how we changed, but they cannot deny that we have been changed for good.

2. 教會領袖無懼 The Church Leaders Were Fearless

While the religious leaders were clueless, the church leaders were fearless. The apostles were arrested twice. However, they were not deterred by the beating and threat. Where did they get the courage? **Verse 8** tells us when being asked where they got the authority to heal the patient: then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit... and he answered the religious leaders with boldness. After Peter and John were released, they reported to the believers what had happened. They prayed together and asked God to strengthen them. **Verse 31** reads: 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. Can you see something in common in the two incidents? The church leaders were filled with the Holy Spirit, then God energized them with boldness. Our charismatic friends tell us that when people are filled with the Holy Spirit, they will have some unusual behaviors. They may laugh, cry or roll on the ground without stopping. I do not see the same effects happening in the Bible! God is not interested in performing a show to entertain us. From the Old to the New Testament, when God manifested His supernatural power His purpose was to draw people to know Him. Miracles prove that there is a God who can act wonders. God gave the disciples a special gift to cure diseases, and He also gave them power to overcome their fear. Today, we should not pray for the ability to perform miracles. Rather, we should ask God for boldness to stand up for Jesus like the disciples did. The Holy Spirit did not only empower the church leaders, He also verified God's plan to them. When they were questioned by the Jews, they quoted a verse in Psalm 118. It is recorded in **verse 11** of our passage: "He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'" Jesus was the stone despised by the religious leaders. But God chose Jesus to become the foundation of the church. Also, in their prayer, the brothers remembered what was written in Psalm 2. In **verses 25-26** of our passage: 25 "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.'" The Holy Spirit prophesied through king David a thousand years before Jesus that one day God's enemies would rise up to oppose His Anointed One, referring to Jesus. All the prophecies about Jesus' birth, life and death had been fulfilled. After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples read the Old Testament with a fresh understanding. The Scripture was written about Jesus' identity and mission. Everything Jesus taught the disciples made perfect sense too. For example, in **Matthew 10:19-20** Jesus told them

that they would be prosecuted and had to testify in court: 19 “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Things happened exactly as Jesus said. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples wisdom to quote the Psalm in their answer. Jesus also warned the disciples the world would hate them because it hated Him first. Persecution was part of God’s masterplan. There would be extreme hardship. Believers would even be martyred for the Christian faith. There was no surprise in what lied ahead of them. But the Holy Spirit gave them courage and guidance. That was why in both interrogations in Acts chapters 4 and 5, the disciples fearlessly replied that they would obey God, rather than submitting to the order of the religious body. Throughout the church history religious persecution has never stopped. Even today, Christians in many countries suffer for what they believe. They have to meet secretly. They cannot openly sing hymns. They may not even allow to have their own Bible. Many were arrested, charged with fake crimes, tortured, and even died as a result. The Christian faith was passed down to us through all that adversity. We enjoy the so-called religious freedom in this country. We may not be indicted or put in jail for what we believe. But are we going to face religious persecution in the 21st century U.S.? Absolutely! Nothing has changed since the early church. People hate what we believe because they hate Jesus first. They hate the truth because God declares their behaviors as sinful. Do not be so naïve to think that we can co-exist with the secular society peacefully. We read our Bible and go to the church, and non-believers just do whatever they want privately. No, the fallen world wants us to agree with its standard! Do not be surprised when people challenge your faith. We may feel uneasy when saying grace at meals in public. People may laugh at us when we wear a T-shirt with a cross or some Bible phrases on it. The opposition we face proves that what we believe is true. After all, Jesus and His disciples encountered the same treatment. But the same Holy Spirit that worked in the disciples will also give us boldness to testify for the Lord. The Holy Spirit will give us wisdom when people ask us tough questions about the Bible. He will also give us gentleness and good articulation to answer people. We can be fearless only when we rely on the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

God calls us to witness the resurrection power of Jesus Christ in us. The world keeps looking for new evidence to reject the resurrection of Jesus. But the truth still stands. Jesus is the risen Lord. Most people may not be interested in the academic debate, historical findings and scientific research behind the topic. The world may never be able to prove or disprove the resurrection of Jesus with certainty. However, they cannot deny the positive changes they see in us. The best argument is perhaps to let our testimonies speak for themselves. Non-believers envy the joy and peace we have. They cannot understand why we live with a different set of values. They know that virtues like honesty and humility are good, but they think that it is too costly to maintain good moral character. Our struggle in the fallen world will continue and the battle will only intensify. Our spiritual enemy, Satan, keeps trying to fool us and scare us. We may feel like chickens when we look at ourselves. Do not forget that God has changed us. Therefore, do not look down at the chicken coop anymore. We no longer belong there. Instead, look up to the resurrected Lord. By His power we can soar like eagles.