

“Solus Christus” // Acts 4:1-32 //
SOLAS

If you have your Bibles begin turning to Acts 4. If you're using one of the Bibles in the pew rack you'll find our text on page 911.

Windmills of the Netherlands

Four years after Columbus sailed the ocean-blue, in 1496 Menno (m-e-n-n-o) Simons was born to a dairy farmer in the village of Witmarsum, in the Netherlands.

We don't know much about his early life. He likely studied at a school in Bolsward near his hometown. We know that he sought to serve the church and so he studied the Early Church Fathers, and he learned Greek and Latin.

The Catholic Priest Who Had Never Read the Bible

We do know that he was ordained in 1524 as a priest of the Catholic Church at Utrecht, Netherlands when he was 28 years old.

After serving as a priest for two years Men made a striking confession. Although he was familiar with Greek and Latin, Simons had only studied Catholic theology. *He had never read the Scriptures for himself.*

“I had not touched them during my life for I feared if I should read them they would mislead me.”

Doubting the Church, Trusting the Scriptures

In 1526, however, he began to question the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. This is the doctrine that states that once the priest has consecrated the bread and the wine for the Lord's supper the individual elements become the actual body and blood

of Christ. Having served the elements for 2 years, Simons wrote,

"It occurred to me, as often as I handled the bread and wine in the mass, that they were not the flesh and blood of the Lord. I thought the devil was suggesting this, that he might separate me from my faith. I confessed it often, sighed and prayed; yet I could not come clear of the idea."

What would Menno do? How could he shake this uncertainty in his mind over what was true? How could he know what to believe? How could he have confidence?

He could find confidence in the same way you and I can find it. Having served as an ordained priest for 2 years, Menno Simons opened a Bible for the first time in his life. He read the Scriptures.

And as he read the Scriptures there was something he could not find anywhere— the doctrine of transubstantiation. While the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was clearly taught and given to the church to regularly observe, there was no argument for the bread and the wine becoming the actual flesh and blood of Christ. The bread and wine were only symbolic of Christ's sacrificial death for sin.

New Gospel, New Baptism

And this discovery opened the door for Menno to an even greater discovery. By reading his Bible Menno discovered the true gospel, which tells us that God graciously saves us in Christ apart from our works.

Simons study of the Bible confirmed the absolute authority of the Bible over Christian doctrine and the traditions of the church. He began to hold up his beliefs to the light of Scripture, and if there was a contradiction, he pitched his own beliefs regardless of how favored they were in the church and trusted to the truth of Scripture.

This commitment to the authority of the Scriptures led Simons to reject the Catholic doctrine of infant baptism, and found what would be, as modern Baptists, one of the streams of our heritage. He founded Anabaptism. Literally, “Re-Baptizers.”

In many ways, Simons taught exactly what we believe about baptism. What is it that we teach about Baptism? Well, I’m glad you asked, because I’d love to explain it to you.

1. Faith does not follow Baptist, but baptism follows faith.
2. Infants are not capable of faith and repentance and therefore should not be baptized.
3. Baptism is the public initiation of the believer into a life of radical discipleship.

The Anabaptists encouraged their church members to reject their baptism at birth in the Catholic Church and to be baptized as fully confessing followers of Christ who were cognizant of their own personal faith.

Friends, one of the biggest differences between the Magisterial reformers like Luther Zwingli and the Anabaptist reformers like Simons is that Luther and Zwingli sought to reform the church from within and eventually were excommunicated. The Anabaptists on the other hand came to believe that the Roman Catholic Church was not just in need of reform, they saw it as a false church altogether. For this reason, Anabaptists were known as the Radical Reformers, and they were hunted down like dogs and killed.

At the Diet of Spires in 1529 Emperor Charles issued this command:

"that each and every rebaptizer and rebaptized person, man or woman, of an accountable age shall be brought from natural life to death with fire, sword, or the like according to the circumstances of the persons without previous inquisition of spiritual judges.”

Menno’s own brother was executed in 1534 along with 300 other Anabaptists at the Old Cloister at Bolsward.

I share such a tragic story because it’s a reminder of how much we have to be thankful for as Baptists in America. It’s also a reminder of the responsibility we bear to maintain, both through prayer and through the political process the right of religious liberty. While the state is given the sword in order to maintain peace and establish law and order, the state should not coerce an individual’s personal beliefs through the power of the sword.

Anabaptists died by the thousands because they lived in a time when the state coerced even the worship of the citizens.

Although there is so much more that I would love to say about the Anabaptists, and I’m sure you wished that all of today’s sermon would be a history lesson, we do have a Biblical text in front of us.

Solus Christus

As we shift to the text I want you to think about the kind of boldness it would have taken to live as a Radical Reformer during the Reformation. Think about the kind of boldness it would require to be willing to die for your belief in Believer’s Baptism just like the Anabaptists.

Where does that kind of confidence come from? It comes from one of the central doctrines of the Reformation. Solus Christus, or Christ Alone.

The Reformers had incredible boldness and confidence because they knew their salvation came from Jesus Christ alone. He was their Savior who had died in their place on the cross. He also reigned as their Lord. He was the one in whom they believed. He is also the one whom they obeyed.

So if you have your Bible, look with me now at John 4. Fair warning—there is no real outline today. We're just going to walk through this long text, explain it, and make applications.

In this passage, the New Testament church is only a few weeks old. In fact, this passage narrates for us events that took place only 6 weeks after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

This was a time of great excitement in the church, because Christ had risen. It was also a time of great pressure, because the church was beginning to experience persecution.

This was a time of incredible revival. Already, the church had grown to 3,000 members in Jerusalem at Pentecost. This was also a time of great threats—the religious people of the day hated the preaching of Jesus.

Let's walk through this text together and learn about this message of Christ Alone:

4 And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

Now think about this for a moment. Here's a church that is basically 6 weeks old, and they've added 5,000 members.

Let me put that into perspective for you. Our best estimates tell us that the entire population of Jerusalem was somewhere between 25,000 and 80,000. This means that within 6 weeks as much as 20% of the city converted to Christianity.

Friends, that would be like 480,000 people in the Charlotte

Metro area converting between now and December 31st. This is spiritual renewal. This is revival.

The church was literally turning the order and structure of the city around in a matter of a couple months. And the religious people hated it.

You saw that the priests and the Sadducees were frustrated by all of these conversions. Little history lesson: the Sadducees were a religious group within first century Judaism and they were also the political power brokers in Jerusalem.

I'm generalizing here but the Sadducees were basically materialistic rationalists. They denied the existence of angels and demons. And they denied the resurrection. These were the educated, wealthy, skeptical elite.

They also rejected the OT promise of a Messiah as a real person who would save Israel. They believed that Messiah was more of an ideal to work towards, rather than a cataclysmic in-breaking of God to rescue his people. They only had temporal hope tied to temporal means—namely political power.

So, they had no hope and no Messiah and that's why they were Sad-D-Cee... Lamé joke.

Why they were frustrated? The church wasn't doing anything extraordinary. Verse 2 tells us they were greatly annoyed because the disciples were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Church, the normal consistent ministry of proclaiming Jesus and making disciples through teaching them the Word does 2 things:

1. It's the source of great revival. If you want to see spiritual renewal in our city we have to use the same means that brought 5,000 people to Jesus in Jerusalem. We have to make the preaching of Jesus Christ, and resurrection in his name alone the

center of our preaching and teaching. Everything we do has to be connected to Jesus.

2. The second thing making disciples and proclaiming Jesus does is that it greatly annoys people who don't believe in a resurrection. In many ways, our culture today is just like the culture the Sadducees had built.

Materialistic. We don't believe in miracles. There is no resurrection. If there's any real hope it's us, and our ability to move the political needle. That's one of the reasons our discourse is filled with vehement and angry speech. It's because our culture's ultimate and final hope is in the worldly, political process.

These first disciples were looking straight in the face to the cultural authorities and saying, "You're wrong about the resurrection. You're also wrong about our hope. Our hope isn't in what we can do, it's in what Jesus has done." And just like the first disciples we are called to make Jesus the center of our preaching and disciple making ministry.

Let's keep reading in verse 5:

5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

I wish we had more time to spend here today. When we try to discern what it was that made the first disciples so confident, this passage gives us a great explanation:

First, the disciples were confident because they knew the truth of their message. 6 weeks prior, they had seen the resurrected Christ. They believed what they were saying was true. Just as

much as I could tell you that last night I ate a bacon lettuce and tomato sandwich for dinner.

Second, the disciples were confident because Jesus had told them, even before he was crucified that the disciples would find themselves in circumstances just like this. Brought before rulers and questioned.

Luke 21:12-15— 12 But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. 13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness. 14 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

Finally, verse 8 tells us the disciples were confident because in these moments they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They relied not on their own strength, but upon the inner witness and power of the Spirit of Christ.

So what did they say to their questioners?

"Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed,

-- In other words, "Are we really being arrested for healing a guy?"

10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter tells us two crucial truths here about Jesus.

Truth #1: Jesus is promised cornerstone of the true faith and the religious leaders of the day should have worshipped him.

What do I mean by that? Well, a couple things.

Do you remember back in the gospels, when Jesus entered Jerusalem just before the crucifixion? Do you remember that? He entered the city riding on the back of a colt. People were laying down their coats and palm branches in front of him. And they were singing a song. Do you remember what they were singing?

They sang Psalm 118. “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” This Psalm is all about how God’s love for us is steadfast. Earlier in the Psalm the people are shouting because God has made a gate of righteousness for them. He has made the gate and opened the gate for them.

The Psalm ends by telling us how it is that God opens the gate for us:

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
27 The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.

HOW?

**Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!**

The gate of righteousness that God opens for his people so that they may enter his presence **is a festal sacrifice**. God has called his people to a festival. They are to have a feast because though they should perish in their sins, God has opened a way for them, and it is a costly way, a bloody way. It’s a sacrifice which is

bound to the altar!

Let me read a larger section of the Psalm so that we can put all this together:

17 **I shall not die, but I shall live,**
and recount the deeds of the LORD.
18 The LORD has disciplined me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.
19 **Open to me the gates of righteousness,**
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD.
20 **This is the gate of the LORD;**
the righteous shall enter through it.
21 I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
22 **The stone that the builders rejected**
has become the cornerstone.
23 **This is the LORD’s doing;**
it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
25 Save us, we pray, O LORD!
O LORD, we pray, give us success!
26 **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!**
We bless you from the house of the LORD.
27 The LORD is God,
and he has made his light to shine upon us.
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,
up to the horns of the altar!

Do you see what Peter is saying to these Sadducees? The songs you taught us to sing—you haven’t believed them. How should we understand this Psalm? Who is the gate? Who is the cornerstone? Who is he who comes in the name of the Lord? Who is the festal sacrifice? It’s Jesus!

Friends, that’s why verse 21 says,

21 I thank you that **you** have answered me
and have become my salvation.

**Truth #2: Because Jesus is the festal sacrifice of Psalm 118,
he is the only way of salvation.**

Take note of what I'm saying. I'm saying that Jesus himself is
the way. He doesn't show us a way. He is the way, and he is the
only way.

Do you see this?

He's not just the gate... he's the only gate.
He's not just the cornerstone... he's the only cornerstone.
He's not just the one who comes in the name of the Lord... very
real sense he's the only one who comes in the name of the Lord
for HE IS THE LORD.
And, he isn't just a festal sacrifice... he's the only sacrifice.

There's a rather famous story about some blind guys who had
never seen an elephant who fell into a hole that had an elephant
in it. Each of the men are trying to find their way around and
they each touch a different part of the elephant.

One touches the tusks and he says, "An elephant is like spears."
One touches the trunk and says, "No, no, no! You're wrong. An
elephant is like rope."
The final guy touches the elephant's leg and says, "You're both
wrong an elephant is like a tree!?"

And people say, "See, religion is like that. Every religion
approaches God and tries to explain him, but God is really bigger
than any one religion, and to claim that you know what God is
like is arrogant."

But there are two massive problems with that analogy:

1. Who sees the whole elephant? The narrator does. That's how
the narrator knows the blind men don't see the whole elephant.
And that's kind of hypocritical.
2. What if the elephant speaks and says, "Hey guys, just so you
know, I'm an elephant." What Christianity is, is believing that
God spoke through Jesus and the Scriptures which were verified
by prophecies, miracles and most importantly the resurrection.

What Peter is saying is this:

If you could get to God through any other way than Jesus, then
the cross was the blunder of the ages.

Why were they preaching the resurrection in the name of Jesus?
Because they understood exactly what Paul would later write in 1
Corinthians 15:3-4

*For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also
received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the
Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third
day in accordance with the Scriptures,*

This is what is of first importance—the resurrection. That's why
they preached resurrection in the name of Jesus. That's why the
reformers like Menno Simons recovered this doctrine. This is
why we preach Jesus Christ in an age of counterfeit gods—it's
because this is what the Scriptures teach.

Look back at verse 13 in our text:

*13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and
perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were
astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

If these verses teach us anything, they teach us that one need not
be a seminary graduate to preach the gospel. Peter and John
didn't go to rabbinic school. They didn't have a PhD in
Theology. Now, they did spend 3 years with Jesus. I get that

that's a pretty exclusive education. Nonetheless, Peter and John are recognized as uneducated.

Do you remember how Jesus made disciples? He preached to the crowds. He sent out the 70. He travelled with the 12 and he had 3 disciples that he invited into the deepest moments of his life. Peter, James and John.

I don't believe this is just descriptive of what Jesus did. I believe Jesus, as our master and chief disciple maker has laid out for us a method for disciple making. Gathering in large groups for teaching and then gathering in small groups for deeper learning and accountability. My prayer is that years from now our church will be filled with smaller groups of people who meet to study the Scriptures and pray.

We won't build the church by sending a few talented individuals to seminaries. We will build the church the way Jesus did, by preaching to large groups and by making disciples in smaller groups. If you want to learn how to do this better I would love to help you.

Verse 14

14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

21 And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

"Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Church, understand that the exclusivity of "Christ Alone" will cause us to face opposition.

Opposed, mocked, persecuted, marginalized, hated. These are words that describe a Christ-filled Christianity.

Jesus himself said:

18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

In these words, our Lord told us that the normal relationship between the world and us, is that we’d be hated. Do not believe for a moment that if Christians can just play their cards right they can both be loved by the world and Jesus.

Yet Peter and John and these first Christians show us how we can respond to opposition:

1. We respond respectfully. Note that Peter gives honor and respect to his opponents. In verse 8 Peter calls them “rulers of the people and elders.” Christians should never take cheap shots at their opponents.

Paul tells us in Colossians 4:

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

We live in a day of hot rhetoric, and you and I are called to live above the demonic tones of sarcasm and ridicule.

2. While we are instructed to obey earthly authorities, our submission only goes so far. We are to obey God rather than men. Know where your true allegiances lie.

3. Pray for God’s Providential Favor

24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God

Their instinctive reaction was prayer. Prayer was the first response, not a last resort.

If something like this happened today you know what most people would do?

- New Rule- Peter and John can’t be together in the same place anymore. Let’s take out an insurance policy and get these guys some armor bearers to protect them.
- Or even worse some would say, “Let’s rethink our message. Let’s privilege our own life above the truth of the Scriptures and the glory of God!”

Thank God we have the examples of persecuted Christians whose first reaction was to pray.

How dependent are we upon the help of God in our life and in the ministry of our church? Let me tell you something, “You are as dependent upon God as your prayer life.”

Now what did they pray? Verse 24.

and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

*“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
26 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’ —*

27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take

place.

Looking back on the events that had happened only 6 weeks earlier here's what they knew:

Herod and Pilate, and even Satan had thought they were in control. Herod was the king. Pilate was the local governor. Satan is the prince of the power of the air. They had concocted a plan to get rid of Jesus. But God almighty had predestined a plan to exalt Jesus.

Satan had worked in the hearts of the people to craft a cross. God the Father in his eternal ordaining counsels had carved out an empty tomb.

Satan planned a crucifixion but the Sovereign Lord had planned a resurrection!

So even if they suffered for preaching salvation in Christ Alone, they knew what Paul wrote when he said:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant

Now stop. Don't read ahead. Seriously. What did they pray for? Did they pray for safety? Did they pray for ease, or relief from oppression?

Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,

They prayed for a continued enablement to preach the gospel through the providential working of God. "God, we know that you have your sovereign hands on the gears and levers of our city— give us your favor so that we might continue to preach the

gospel unhindered.

What do we pray for in persecution and pain? Typically, we pray for protection, or deliverance from pain. **I'm sure they wanted those things, but more than they wanted a favorable outcome around them, they prayed for a faithful spirit within them.**

So, when you pray what do you pray for? Friend, pray for a faithful spirit within you.

A Hunted Heretic

For the last 24 years of his life Menno lived as a hunted heretic. In 1542 Emperor Charles V issued an edict against him and offered 100 gold guilders for Menno's arrest. Most of his preaching was done under the cover of night as faithful Anabaptist brothers and sisters gathered in secret to worship. He baptized new believers in country streams and hidden lakes. He had ordained ministers from Amsterdam to Cologne to Danzig.

For Menno, there was no way for a true Christian to avoid the cross. "If the Head had to suffer such torture, anguish, misery, and pain, how shall his servants, children, and members expect peace and freedom as to their flesh?"

In 1561, 25 years after his break from the Roman Church, Menno died and was buried in his own garden at Wustenfled.

Reflecting on his life's purpose Menno wrote these words:

"This is my only joy and heart's desire: to extend the kingdom of God, reveal the truth, reprove sin, teach righteousness, feed hungry souls the Word of God, lead the straying sheep into the right path, and gain many should to the Lord through his Spirit, power and grace. So would I carry on in my weakness as he has taught me who has purchased me, a miserable sinner, with his crimson blood, and he has given me this mind by the gospel of his grace, namely, Jesus Christ."

BULLPEN: Unused Material

While we're here can we just talk about politics for a moment?

Here are men whose god was political power. We are not to be like them. Our church is not to worship politics as supreme. Our hopes do not rise and fall upon who is in office.

At the same time, it is obvious from the exit polls of every election that Christians are failing to live out their personal faith in the public arena.

We just wrapped up local elections and the number of religious voters increased by 32% from 2015. This means that 32,000 religious people voted in local elections in 2015. 50,000 voted in this last election. However, 79% of Charlotte's population stayed home and did not vote, many of them followers of Jesus.

Friends, don't be like the Sadducees. Don't worship politics and please don't worship politicians. But live out your personal faith in the public sphere. One of the ways we seek justice and peace in the city is through the electoral process.

Back to the Sadducees.

Although they are free from this world, Christians are called to submit to governing authorities for the good of fellow citizens and for the propagation of the gospel until the return of Christ.

However, this submission only goes so far. There is a hierarchy to our submission. When worldly authorities like our government (and we should understand this— our government is not a Christian authority. Our Constitution is not a Christian authority. It is an authority which is established by God's

providence as much as any other worldly authority, and it can be an authority which is filled with Christians and exemplifies Biblical truth— we should work and pray for that) — but when worldly authorities such as our government oppose and contradict the authority of God those authorities become demonic and just as the early believers did, we also should know where our true allegiance lies.