

# THE POWER OF OPPOSITION - ORIGINS SERIES PART 1 - THE WAY CHURCH SHOULD BE

Ben Rudolph

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Good morning Life Fellowship. I hope you all are doing well today. It was a great day yesterday when we had almost a hundred people in here learning about how to share their faith. It was another great step for our church to becoming a 'sent' church. As you know, we have a theme of being a 'sent' church as opposed to being a 'collecting' church, so we have been doing a lot of things to help us move the needle. One of the things that we have been doing is training our minds to look at the church the way the church should be by studying the book of Acts. And Pastor Dan did an amazing job on teaching Acts 3 last week.

One of the things that we have seen in the progression of this narrative that Luke has written for us is that we can sense the momentum of the narrative. The Holy Spirit has come, people are getting saved, people are getting baptized, they are preaching, they are healing people, and there is just this amazing sense of movement that God is doing. And here is what we know - where there is any story where good things are happening, there will be bad opposition, every single time.

And in Acts Chapter 4, where we will be today, we will begin to see the opposition to God's church rear its head. In fact if you noticed the bumper video you know that we put some words up there. One of the words on our bumper video was the word 'opposition.' For some of us that may seem hard, because when we think about how God is for us, and how God is moving through us, we sometimes forget, and this is true in all of life, that when God moves the enemy of God will move as well. It will happen.

So we have here in the narrative the first pushback to the movement of God. To help set it up before we read this passage, remember last week Pastor Dan preached about Peter and John going to the temple at the hour of prayer. They healed a man who had been crippled for his entire life. A huge crowd gathered around and Peter just begins to preach, and he declares that Jesus is Lord. Peter talked about the power of the name of Jesus, and Dan did an amazing job with that. Peter just preached the gospel and more and more people were getting saved.

But here is the problem. They did this in the temple. This is the same place where Jesus had been when He was on trial. And now we see the opposition rear its head. Let's begin reading Acts Chapter 4 and verse 1.

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

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*to about five thousand. On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.”*

So here is the deal. Peter and John got arrested and they are brought before the basic Sanhedrin, the people who were the rulers of the people of Israel. And these men had incredible authority, religious authority as well as political authority. So Peter and John are before these people which would be the equivalent of you and I being put on trial before the Supreme Court and the Congress of the United States. That would be the equivalent. So Peter and John are standing before these men. Let's pick up again in verse 7.

*“And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’ Now take notice of that key word ‘name’ as it occurs in this text. “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 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. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.”*

*“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. 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. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through this is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 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.”*

*“So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 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, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’ 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. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.”*

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This morning I want to talk to you about the reality of opposition. When we step out in faith to do what God is calling us to do, we will face opposition. It is a reality and it is true in all of life. In fact Jesus mentioned this in John Chapter 15 and verses 18 to 20, when He was preparing His disciples for when He would leave. Jesus said:

***“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 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. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”***

Why do we think that when it comes to following Jesus, it is going to be all rainbows and lollipops? *‘I’m following Jesus. God is for me. It is all going to be great.’* And then all of a sudden we step out on faith and wham, something happens that just knocks us back.

I remember when this happened to me in a very profound way. In 2006 we were called out of Northside Baptist Church to plant a church in Denver, North Carolina. Now in Denver, North Carolina in 2006 there was nothing. If you are familiar with Denver you will remember it was before Walmart, before Lowe’s, and the only shopping place was Harris Teeter.

So we were going to Denver to plant this church, and I had read in a church planting book, that when you are going to plant a church in a new town you needed to take your business cards and go meet all the business leaders. So I thought this would be great. So on my first week in Denver I thought I would meet all the business leaders. I just had this picture in my mind of how it was going to be as I went around town meeting the business leaders. Because when you leave a church to go plant a new church everyone is excited about it, and they all think it is awesome. It is kind of like when soldiers go off to war, and they give you this great send off. But then they get out on the battlefield where all of a sudden people are trying to kill you, and it is not fun anymore.

So I went into Harris Teeter with my business cards and I would shake hands with those I met and I would say, *‘I am Ben Rudolph and we are planting a new church in Denver. I just wanted to meet you.’* And this one guy was working in the produce area, and after I told him who I was and that we were planting a new church there in Denver, he started yelling and swearing at me saying, *‘Get out of my store. I don’t want your God and I don’t want your church anywhere near me. Do you hear me?’* And I was like, *‘Okay, it’s all right,’* in a very meek voice. *(Laughter.)*

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I was really shell shocked. I walked out of Harris Teeter, got in my car, drove home, and got back in bed. (*Laughter.*) And I thought, ‘*There was no chapter about this in the church planting book. What happens when someone yells at you?*’ And here is what I realized that day. When you step out in faith to be a follower of God and to share His gospel with people, you are going to get punched in the face. And you better be ready for it because it is a reality. The reality of what it means to follow Jesus.

And so one of the things that we have to realize is that so many times we only hear about the blessings of following Christ, and yes, there are amazing and wonderful blessings. We see the blessings and we hear about the blessings that are so great. But we have to be honest and realize that there is also a cost, and that there will be opposition. Jesus told us if we are going to follow Him we have to pick up our cross and follow Him.

So we have to be honest, real and genuine about it. When we sense that God is calling us out in greater ways, we will face opposition. We will face opposition from people and we will face opposition spiritually. One of the themes in the book of Acts is that the church will be opposed over and over and over again. A church that is not facing opposition is a church that is not on mission with God. We can talk and talk about how great it is going to be, and how we need to take the gospel to every man, woman and child in Lake Norman, and how we want to be a sending church, and we want to plant churches and other great things, but that is going to happen at a cost. And we have to be a church that is ready. If we want to be a church the way God has created His church we have to be prepared for this opposition.

So this morning we are going to talk about three things - the reason for opposition, the readiness for opposition and the response of opposition - the reason, the readiness and the response of opposition. First let’s look first at the reason for opposition. I hope you noticed as I read that passage how many times the word ‘name’ came up. Peter and John had just healed someone, so you would think the temple authorities would be saying, ‘*This is great. The beggar at the temple gate has been healed. It is wonderful.*’

No, these authorities were ticked off. Why were they ticked off? It had nothing to do with the healing. It had nothing to do with the good deed that was done. It had everything to do with the fact that they were preaching and healing in the name of Jesus Christ. Listen, people will allow you to talk about God, they will allow you to talk about religion, but do not bring up the name of Jesus. And that is because the name of Jesus is a threat to people in authority.

Here is one of the things that we sometimes forget in our common American understanding of Jesus. We talk about Jesus as Savior and Jesus is the Savior. He came

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to die on the cross for our sin, He bore our penalty and the weight of our sin. Through the cross and His resurrection He takes the sin and the shame from us and He gives us His righteousness. That is what the gospel is and that is what Peter has been preaching. But Jesus also came as a king, and He said He came to establish a new kingdom. And when those in authority hear Jesus' name He is a threat to their power, because they fear He will be about establishing a new authority in this world.

His kingdom is not about any earthly authority. Every earthly authority has to yield to Jesus. In fact Paul mentions this in Philippians when he wrote: "***At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.***" Man, that's powerful. Pastor Dan talked about the name of Jesus being powerful, and the name of Jesus is amazing. It is healing, it is wonderful and it saves.

But the name of Jesus also confronts. Why didn't these authorities want the name of Jesus to be spoken? It was because these were people of authority, political and religious authority and Jesus threatened it all. Listen, anyone that will oppose the name of Jesus, and will oppose you to take the name of Jesus feels threatened. That is the reality. They don't know what to do with it and they don't know how to make sense of it.

And the name of Jesus is also exclusive. It is not just authoritative and powerful, it is also exclusive. Peter mentioned this in verse 12 when he said, "***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.***" And that is hard today, because the common spirit of the age wants to believe that all roads lead to God. And they think that you can believe what you want to believe. and I can believe what I want to believe, but we will all meet in Heaven someday. But the name of Jesus is exclusive and it confronts that mentality because Jesus said, "***I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***"

The name of Jesus is exclusive and that is hard today. There is a common belief among young people today, people that are about twenty-five and younger, and this is especially true with college age kids, they believe that if you tell someone that they are wrong they equivocate that with hatred. And that is very difficult for us today, because how can we debate ideas like that? So we have to be very gentle with this. I am not saying that we ever step back away from truth; we must always hold our ground with truth. But what this does is it confronts our own spirit to ask if we are leading with love, if we are leading with grace.

Listen, we should be the most loving, gracious people in our work environments. We should be the most loving, gracious people in our neighborhoods. We should have the most hospitable home in our block. And when we do have these conversations and

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people feel threatened and confronted, when we explain that there is only way to Heaven through Jesus Christ, they will also understand that we are not doing it out of hate.

A few years ago when I was with another church I would meet up with another pastor friend named Bobby. And we would go to Trade and Tryon Streets right in uptown Charlotte almost every Monday. And we would spend about two hours there during the lunch break between 11:30 to 1:30. And my friend Bobby would just set up a little sound system, and then he would play worship music on his guitar for those two hours. There wouldn't be any preaching, no big hellfire and brimstone speaking, just playing worship music. I would stand there and if people would stop and listen I would come along side of them and have conversations with them. It was a wonderful time where we just got to share Jesus right on the streets of Charlotte.

But I will never forget one time when Bobby was singing, and then he stopped and started talking about how good Jesus was. And these two girls who looked like young professionals, maybe just out of college, were walking by, and they turned to each other and one said, '*Can he do that in public?*' Of course he can do that in public, but I could see the mindset of these young women that yes, you can believe whatever you want to believe, but you better keep it private. They want us to keep Jesus in this room on Sundays and for us keep Jesus in our homes at night, but don't you dare bring Jesus out into the public square.

And what we have to confront is our own heart and ask, '*Am I willing to be known as a Jesus follower, or merely a church goer?*' Listen, it is easy to be known as a church goer. It is easy to be known as someone who is just a nice person. '*Man, they are so great. They are so nice. They are so kind. They go to church and they are religious.*' But things change though when you start talking about Jesus. And we have to ask ourselves if we are more willing to be known as a church goer than a Christ follower, because when we bring up Jesus that is when the confrontation and the opposition takes place.

It is not enough to let people know that you go to church. What Christ wants is His name declared and to fill this earth. It is our responsibility to do that. You might be sitting there and you are new to church, new to discovering and learning about God and Jesus. And maybe in your pursuit of discovering and learning more about the truth you have faced more opposition in your life than you have ever faced before. Let me just tell you something - you are on the right path. God wants you close to Him, and there is only one way that you can truly know Him and that is in the person of Jesus Christ. And if you are seeking Jesus to know Him more personally and in a real way, don't give up just

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because there are some road blocks. Jesus loves you and He wants you to be a part of His family.

So the reason for opposition is always the name of Jesus. The second component is making sure we are ready for opposition. Luke wrote Acts, which was his second book, with the first book being the gospel of Luke. Look at verse 8 where it says: ***“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders.’”*** And Peter just takes off. Luke is trying to paint this picture where when we read this account we are thinking, *‘What in the world happened to Peter? What has happened to him?’*

Now we don’t know how much time has passed from when Christ was crucified to here, but I am guessing between two and three months have transpired. Remember when Jesus was on trial all of the disciples had left Him because they were afraid. Peter was following, and he warmed himself at the fire watching the trial from a distance. And a teenage girl walks up to Peter, and said, *‘Hey, aren’t you a follower of Jesus?’* And Peter said, *‘I don’t know what you are talking about.’* And he denies Jesus three times.

So now we are reading this account and we wonder how is it that Peter three months ago was confronted by a teenage girl and he practically wets his pants, and now he is standing before the most powerful people in his community and he is pointing his fingers in their faces saying, *‘You killed Jesus.’* What has happened to him? Well, Luke wants us to see something. He wants us to see the difference in Peter now, because he is filled with the Holy Spirit. That is the difference. The difference between you being ready for opposition and you not being ready for opposition is the Holy Spirit inside of you. That word ‘filled’ with the Holy Spirit means controlled by Him. It means that He has complete control of your life.

Remember a couple of weeks ago we talked about how the Holy Spirit comes after true salvation. You are not a follower of Jesus if you have never received the Holy Spirit. So the first question is - are you a follower of Jesus? And then the next question is - if you are a follower of Jesus does the Holy Spirit have you? We want the Holy Spirit to have complete control of our lives because when He does, we won’t be the same. We will be different. We will be confronted with who we used to be. And many times when we are confronted with the reality of opposition the way we deal with it is what is natural to us. Peter was acting in a way that was not normal for him. He was someone who had discovered what it was like to depend on the Holy Spirit. So when we read Peter’s sermon here in Acts we have to understand that is not Peter speaking, but that is God speaking through Peter by the Holy Spirit.

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And that is the way it should be in our lives. Do you remember about a month ago when I preached a sermon and I had to sit down? Maybe you didn't know that I was not feeling well that day. And the story behind the scene is that God taught me a lot about the Holy Spirit about a month ago. I have a problem called a frozen shoulder which is basically something that old men get when they turn 80 years old or so. But I got it when I was 42, so I don't know what means. (*Laughter.*) But it means I can't move my shoulder very much and it was really hurting one day. I had not slept but about three hours a night for two weeks, and I was just exhausted. I went to the doctor on the Friday before I was to preach on Sunday, and he gave me a cortisone shot thinking that should really help it a lot.

But the shot made it ten times worse. The nerve endings in my shoulder had an allergic reaction to cortisone. Do you remember the feeling you get when you stub your toe against a brick wall or something? It was that kind of feeling and it just wouldn't go away. So by Friday night I am just thinking this was not good. I was just praying and praying, you know like when you get those charismatic moments when you are hurting. I am taking Ibuprofen, but it isn't touching it, and so I didn't sleep at all Friday night because of the excruciating pain.

The doctor called in a prescription for me on Saturday but we couldn't get it until 5:00 that afternoon, so I found some old pain medication that I took just to dull the pain. And I managed to sleep about two hours Saturday night. I woke up Sunday morning knowing I had to preach, but I felt completely drained. Just to sit up in bed was exhausting to me. And I told the Lord, '*I don't know how I am going to do this. I don't think I can stand up to preach this morning.*' Believe it or not it takes a lot of energy to preach. So I came to church that morning and I let everyone know I wasn't feeling well. I brought my pillow with me, I put it in my office and I laid down after telling everyone to let me know when it was time for me to preach. And when it was time I came in and I preached. Then I laid back down until time to preach again. After that I got my pillow and I went home and slept for three hours. It was an unbelievable experience.

But here is what I realized. For those of you who heard me preach that Sunday about a month ago when I was completely empty, I want you to understand that was not me on stage. It was not me. It was one of the greatest experiences of the Holy Spirit I have ever had. When I got on stage it was like the Holy Spirit was carrying me along. I don't even know what I said that day. And here is the reality, when I look back at that moment I just thank God because He really came through for me that day.

And the Holy Spirit reminded me, '*You know, Ben, that is the way it should always be.*' You see many times in our lives we go through these moments where we

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think we have about eighty percent of this and we need the Holy Spirit to kick in the extra twenty percent. Or we think we have about fifty percent and we need the Holy Spirit to give us the other fifty percent. And we don't depend on the Holy Spirit the way He wants us too.

One of the things I love about this passage, as well as from the experience that God gave me about a month ago, was to remind me that I don't want my life to be about what I have done; rather I want everyone to look at God and see what He has done. And when we step out on faith, like trying to read our Bible more, or lead our family better in family devotions, or trying to share our faith with our friends and co-workers more, and we get punched in the face, how will we be ready to respond? Do you respond in a natural way or do you respond in the way that the Holy Spirit was filling you and controlling you?

If we want to be a supernatural church like we talked about two weeks ago, that means that we have to do things that are not natural to us. So in everything we do, every time we walk into our work environment we need to ask God to lead us today one hundred percent. Every time we walk into church we need to praise God and ask Him to let the Holy Spirit lead us one hundred percent. As we are teaching our children we need to ask for one hundred percent of the Holy Spirit to guide us. We need one hundred percent of the Holy Spirit to lead us, guide us, and use us, because when the one percent of me tries to do something it never works.

Listen, we are only as ready as our submission to the Holy Spirit. We are only as ready as much as we submit to the Holy Spirit. So the readiness of Peter and John was attributed to the Holy Spirit. Let's look at verse 13 again. "***Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished.***" The men listening to Peter and John realized that this was not normal. They knew that Peter and John had never been to a religious school, and they couldn't explain this. They couldn't explain their knowledge. They couldn't explain their boldness. They couldn't explain their communication ability. They couldn't figure out where this was coming from.

And then look what it says next. "***And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.***" I have to believe when Luke is writing this under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he was just smirking when he write that sentence. He was just smirking because here is what that line means. From the Sanhedrin's perspective, from the high priest, the rulers, the scribes, and the elders, from their perspective they knew that Peter and John had been with this teacher, this rabbi, Jesus. But from where Peter was standing, he had been with the risen King Jesus.

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And there is a difference. There is a massive difference. And if you follow Jesus you can either follow Him as your teacher, as your ultimate moral authority, or you will follow the risen King. And there is a massive difference in the way your life will look if you follow the risen King. So if you are simply following Jesus as a good teacher, to apply morals to your life, you may try to live your best life, you may try to live a good, moral life, you may try to be a nice and kind person, but you will never see the impact of transformation and supernatural workings in and through you unless you approach the risen Jesus, because there is no earthly explanation.

Peter and John realized that these men could not hurt them. They had just been with Jesus who rose from the dead. They probably were sitting in jail that night thinking about what they are going to say the next day. They had just seen these same people kill their friend, but they knew this - that whatever they did to Jesus didn't stick, because there was a power with Jesus that they had access to as well. They could be beaten, they could be tortured, they could even kill them, but they could never destroy their soul. I would have loved to have heard the conversation of Peter and John in that prison jail cell. *'How are we going to respond? I don't know, but I know that even if they hurt us we know how this story ends.'* And that is the perspective you and I need. Are you ready for opposition?

The last component is - the response to opposition. Verse 18 says, ***"So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."*** They warned them and they threatened them. But I love Peter and John's response in verse 19, ***"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."*** I love this response.

Do you know why I love this response? It is because when you and I are faced with opposition we can tend to fall into two ditches in our response. We can either fall into the ditch of pride or the ditch of fear. Fear and pride are always our greatest enemies in life. And Peter and John did not choose to respond in pride or to respond in fear. And let me tell you how both of those responses would look like. When you respond in pride, it just becomes about whether you are right or wrong. If someone confronts you and says they don't believe in Jesus, you might say something like, *'Oh yeah, well you are stupid. You are an idiot.'* And you would go into this long argument or debate and you would be determined to beat them up with the truth. You would want to knock them over the head with your truth facts about Jesus so that you can win this argument. That is pride because it is all about you; it is all about you being right.

Other people with the pride factor are just looking for an opposition. They just walk around looking for someone to debate with. *'Tell me you don't believe in Jesus and*

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*I will knock you over the head with my facts because I am just ready.*’ But with other people it is not pride; rather it is fear because they are more of a timid person. Any kind of opposition makes them keep your head down, because they don’t want to ruffle any feathers. And it is as much about them in fear as it is in pride.

But Peter and John’s response is marked by boldness and grace. They told the leaders that they should judge whether or not they should listen to them or to God; that was their choice. But all they could do was to speak to what they had seen and heard. That is all they could speak of. They had experienced something that was real. They had seen it and they had heard it. And their experience with the risen Jesus was real, so they could not help but talk about what was real in their life.

And for us in this room, it has to be real. We have to encounter the real Jesus if our lives are going to be different. I love the Life Talk episode that Pastor Dan and Pastor Jason recorded that was all about the idea of personal worship. And if you haven’t listened to that yet, just go on the Podcast and listen to that Life Talk episode. It is amazing. Here is what Pastor Jason said, “*You cannot encounter the person of God and stay the same.*” You just can’t. You cannot encounter the real Jesus and stay the same. You have to be different. It is going to change you. It is going to radically change you. And Peter was just saying, ‘*Listen, I can’t help but just speak to what I have experienced. It is real in my life.*’ Notice they didn’t say, ‘*We can’t help but speak of what we know,*’ because it was not knowledge based. No, they had actually experienced it by seeing and hearing Jesus.

And this is where I want to speak to some of the younger people in this room, some of you who are in high school or middle school. You are growing up in your parent’s households and for most of your life you have been dragged to church, or you have come to church for a variety of reasons. But let me just say this - there is going to come a point in all of your lives, young people, where you may have more knowledge about God than actually love for God. And one of the things I would encourage you to understand in this passage is that John is only about 16 or 17 years old here from what we know. He was a teenager and he was able to make a bold declaration to people who were much older than he was.

And let me just say to you that age is no excuse for lack of experience. You can know God as powerfully and real at 15, 16 or 17 as your parents do at 40, 50 or 60. It is about faith not age. And you can know God is as real as your parents can. And parents, don’t put a low bar of expectation of your kids experiencing God. Expect God to speak to them. One of the things that we have to ask ourselves is if we were put in the position of Peter and John, what would we say that we have experienced.

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When I was in Bible College up in northeast Pennsylvania, it was about two hours from New York City. And this was in the late 90's so it was during the height of when Seinfeld was on. Remember that show? How many of you remember the episode about the Soup Nazi? Well, that was based off of a real guy who sold soup in New York City. I don't think he is still there, but my friends and I found out where this guy worked, so every time we went to New York City we would go get soup from the original Soup Nazi. And the line for this soup would be clear around the block just because the soup was so fantastic.

The best soup I have ever had there was this lobster bisque. I mean this was a bowl of soup that was a meal. There were lots of pieces of lobster and crab, and it was so creamy and flavorful. It was just so, so good. And now I see some of you are thinking, *'What are you doing, Ben, talking about lobster bisque. It's 12:00 and we're hungry.'*

But did you ever eat at some place where you think the food is just so good? And when you talk to people about this place you just have to go on and on about how good the food is. And you want them to go and experience it also. Now I can tell you all about this lobster bisque, I can tell you about all the ingredients in it and how delicious it is. And then you from the knowledge that you received from me could defend that the lobster bisque from the Soup Nazi in New York City is the best lobster bisque ever. But you have never tasted it yourself - and that is the difference. We are able to respond best to that we have experienced personally ourselves.

And we have to make sure that we are ready for those moments when we face opposition that we can speak from experience. *'You tell me God is not real?' 'Let me tell you how real God is.'* Listen, I don't care what rules, standards or barriers you put on me of sharing Jesus, I can only share what I have experienced with Him, and that is that He is real. And I can't help but tell people about Him. That is the challenge we have going forth. Are you ready for that moment?

I want to leave you with a couple of application questions before we close. Number one - do your friends and co-workers know you as a church goer or a Christ follower? Do your friends, co-workers and people around you know you more as a church goer or as a Christ follower? God is calling some of you today to say, *'It is not enough for people to know me as religious. It is not enough for people to know that I go to church. It is time for me to start naming the name of Jesus.'*

The second question is this - how will you get ready for opposition? How are you going to learn to submit to the Holy Spirit day by day, issue by issue in your life? How are you encountering the risen Jesus, not just Jesus as teacher? Oppositions will come. Many of us have these Life Bands on representing the one person close to us but far from

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God. And some of you were in this room yesterday when we heard the first story from someone in our church who had the privilege of leading their one person to Christ last week. That was the first story I heard of our One Life Initiative having someone come to Christ, and it was awesome. (*Applause.*)

I love hearing those great stories. And there also may be a lot of other stories where you tell me, '*Ben, I stepped out and I stood up for Jesus and I got punched in the face.*' And I want to celebrate that as well, because they are real and it is going to happen as we face opposition. We need to be ready for those moments as well.

Question number three - if you could only respond to what you have seen and heard, how would you respond? Peter told the leaders that they could only respond to what they had seen and heard. What have you experienced in the person of Jesus yourself? If all of your experience is a church experience, then you have never encountered Jesus; therefore you cannot call yourself a true Christ follower. Our experience has to be more than church, more than a Sunday morning; it must be with the risen Savior. And He is calling you today to follow Him. Don't deny Him as He calls you today. Respond because He loves you and He wants you to follow Him.

Let's bow our heads and close our eyes as God calls us to respond this morning. As you know we are going to have some people down front and maybe you need to talk to someone. Maybe you have questions about God, maybe you have questions about church, or maybe you have questions about opposition. If you are sitting here this morning, and you have questions, there are two places for you to go for answers. There are people up here in the front, and also you could leave the room and go to your right and there is a prayer room with people there ready to talk to you and pray with you.

Maybe you are sitting here this morning, and you are going through an incredible bit of opposition and you need someone to pray with you. Again, feel free to come up front, or go to the prayer room and pray with someone. Maybe your response is that God wants you to stop being known as a church goer and you want to be known as a Christ follower. Maybe you just need prayer for boldness and you want to confess that to the Lord. You can come up front to one of the crosses to pray. Others of you may want to go to one of the stations and partake of communion.

However God is calling you to respond, we have people who would love to talk with you on any need you have. Don't leave here today and not respond to the Holy Spirit the way He is calling you to respond. Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you so much for helping us to understand that opposition is normal and real and it is not something that is a sign that you are not for us. God, help*

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*us to be equipped and prepared to handle opposition however it may come. God, I pray that we would be a people that do not shrink from opposition but advance into it by the power of your Holy Spirit. Please God, lead us and guide us today by your great name. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.*