

## Compelled (part 2)

In last week's NEWSLETTER, we looked at the preaching of Peter and John in the face of opposition and persecution. Although being told at least twice by the ruling council of the Jews NOT to preach in the name of Jesus Christ anymore, they still continued to do so. They, as recorded in **Acts 4:19-20**, said they HAD to preach. They HAD to tell the story of Jesus Christ. They simply couldn't help themselves. They chose to obey God rather than men. (**Acts 5:29**) They followed that statement with this one:

***“The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:30-32)***

There it is: the gospel they were compelled to deliver.

Paul (as Saul) was a persecutor of Christians. He stood by at the stoning of Stephen, holding the cloaks of the ones who stoned him, giving his approval. He, according to **Acts 8:3**, ***“began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.”*** Later, in **Acts 9:1-2**, it is said that ***“Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”***

But something happened on his trip to Damascus. He met Jesus Christ. And from that time on, he preached the gospel he had been so dead-set to silence. He was dogged by the Jews who attempted to stop him on many an occasion from preaching. Yet he still continued to preach, in spite of difficulty, opposition, and persecution. He was compelled to preach. He simply couldn't help himself.

Of the gospel, he said in **Romans 1:16-17**:

***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”***

It was this gospel that he preached all over the known world. It is this truth that he preached in front of people in authority, be they Jew or Roman. It is this message that ultimately caused him to lose his life. Yet, he faced death as one who knew his message had the power to save all mankind, including himself.

Paul instructed Timothy to preach the good news of Christ ***“in season and out of season; (when convenient and when not convenient, and use it to) “correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.” (2 Timothy 4:2)***

Paul said this to the Corinthian church in **1 Corinthians 9:16**:

***“For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”***

There it is! Paul couldn't help himself! He was compelled to preach, no matter how his message was treated: with complete acceptance or full rejection. And that's how we should look at our relationship to the “old, old, story.” Preach it. Not because you feel you should, but because you simply can't help yourself. Do that, and let God do the rest.

---Johnny Stephens