

BOLD CHRISTIANITY IN AN INCREASINGLY HOSTILE WORLD - Cedarview Community Church, August 31, 2025 Evening Service.

Good evening, church. This evening I am addressing a rather large topic - bigger than we can cover fully in one evening, but I want to make sure that we all leave here this evening with a renewed sense of urgency of the need to boldly and intelligently live out our Christian faith in increasingly trying times.

Australia, April 4, 2025 - the government of the state of New South Wales has criminalized anti conversion therapy. This includes praying with someone about their gender or sexual identity even if they request prayer.

Arizona, June 2025. Adam Sheafe, 51, killed a 76 year old pastor, Bill Schonemann. It was premeditated and he had followed the pastor, heard a Bible study that Schonemann had led. His reason for killing him in his own home? According to Sheafe, pastors and priests are misleading people by teaching the New Testament and that Jesus, in Sheafe's words, "Is a false God." He admitted that he had plans and names in place of at least 14 other pastors and priests he planned to kill. The details are too graphic for me to share this evening.

Later in June 2025, a gunman recklessly drove his truck up to Crosspointe Community Church in Indiana where 150 people were celebrating and praising God for the culmination of their VBS. He opened fire and injured a security team member but two armed staff members stopped him. In the back story, the gunman's mother is a long time member of the church.

And now to Canada:

In 2022, Josh Alexander, a teenager in a Renfrew area high school and a Christian, criticized publicly that he was against a policy of the school allowing biological males identifying as females to access girls washrooms. When he would not back down, he was suspended and was not allowed to return to any school in that board's jurisdiction.

His parents, Matt and Nicole, were both teachers for another board and had great performance reviews from their schools over the years. In 2023, a social media campaign was underway to criticize Matt Alexander (not on social media himself, by the way), that he wasn't enthusiastically embracing the DEI (diversity, Equity and Inclusion) of the LGBTQetc. groups imposed by the school board. By the way, there had been no complaints about Matt or his wife Nicole regarding this issue but they had been quietly open about their Christian faith.

After being suspended for nearly a year, they were both fired by the Renfrew County District School Board. There is continuing legal action going on about this. I've heard these teachers interviewed; they have boldly stuck to their beliefs and their faith and as a result have suffered some significant setbacks. They had to sell their house. Nearing 50 years of age, they are both retraining for new careers. What has impressed me the most about their story is the grace and gentleness they exude. Fruit of the Spirit at work I think.

Each one of these stories has a subtext and other details we could pursue and I could go on with other examples - the more than 33 Christian churches destroyed by arson in Canada since 2021 - a whole side story there we don't have time this evening to explore, or the murder of Christians in Africa, and parts of the middle east, or the persecution and imprisonment of believers in North Korea, China, and many other parts of the world. I recall, as some of you might, the murder in Haiti of Oklahoma based

Christian missionaries Davy and Natalie Lloyd, who were known by Adrian and Sharon Thomas.

About 15 years ago, when our daughter was at York University, I recall her recounting the regular scrum of Muslim students in the Student Centre who had a booth permanently set up, and loudly denounced the Christian and Jewish students on campus vocally and with signs. Occasionally this devolved into pushing and shoving with other students and the campus police would be called. Ellen found this unsettling to say the least.

My whole reason for sharing these stories is that we live in an increasingly hostile world; being a Christian is, in many places and situations, under attack, including in our own country. You can see it on social media. There are whole websites devoted to documenting this.

Am I trying to make you fearful? Not at all, but the best defence for us as Christians is to be informed, and to boldly live out our faith.

Now that we've set the stage, the rest of this lesson is based on some presuppositions I believe we as Christians can agree upon.

A. Christ has called us to share the gospel. (The Great Commission)

B. We are called to do this as the church, corporately, through our ministries and missions.

C. You and I are also called to do this as individuals.

D. Scripture reminds us that as Christians, we will face adversity of various kinds.

Let's look at our first scripture: **Mark 8-34-38**

“And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

As I have read, reread, and prayed about this text there are several things that jump out at me.

We- you and I - need to deny ourselves individually. "take up his cross" (or "your cross") in a Christian context means to embrace suffering, sacrifice, and self-denial in obedience to God and it's a commitment to follow Jesus' teachings, even at great personal cost. It's a call to submit your will to Christ, prioritizing spiritual values over worldly desires, and living a life devoted to Him; this may involve hardship, persecution, and a willingness to give up your own life for His sake. This, I believe, requires boldness, and not just in the relative emotional safety of the church community. Sometimes we feel safe in this echo chamber.

Jesus has made this personal for you and me; he's saying I am to deny myself and my idolatrous attachments, whatever they are, and to follow him.

In verse 38 he references the eternal consequences of being ashamed of him and his words. **“For whoever is ashamed of me**

and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Remember Paul’s declaration in **Romans 1:16?** **16 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.**

Oh, to be able to declare that boldly and consistently at school, at work, with our unsaved loved ones, with our friends and colleagues, at the grocery store or in line at the new Costco!

So we are to deny ourselves, and unashamedly and consistently declare our love and devotion to the Lord, and to recognize this may bring adversity as we are reminded again and again throughout scripture.

In **1 Peter 3:13-17** we get a glimpse of how we are to comport ourselves in our sharing of the Good News!

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Peter reminds us here that we may suffer, but that in the suffering for righteousness sake we will also be blessed! And you and I are to be prepared to boldly defend our faith and we are instructed to do so ***gently and respectfully*** - to be above board in our actions and manner. Notice there is nothing here about forcing our beliefs onto someone, or browbeating them in some heavy handed way.

I had a new Christian ask me recently, “How do I prepare myself so that I can make a good defence of the hope that is in me?” This is a great question for both new Christians and those who have been walking with the Lord for years.

So how do we do this, preparing ourselves?

1. Read your Bible. Get to know it intimately. Pray it! Speak it aloud and memorize it so that it gets right into your spiritual DNA!

2. Study the history of Christianity. You can be bolder when you know what you’re talking about! From the book of Acts to the writings of Christian apologists, there is a wealth of information about progress that has come about because of the influence of God’s word and Christianity as an influencer of societies. The abolition of slavery, the ascent of democracy, great strides in science and the arts, women being recognized as fully human and not property, (another form of slavery!), the legal system etc. are all areas of society that have grown and become more just and fair as the result of Christian influence. This is a lesson or three in itself but I want you to think about it.

3. Study Christian Apologetics. By reading or watching good Christian apologetics, you can prepare yourself to confidently and boldly defend your faith. (there is a huge list of terrific books and videos; if you are interested, send me an email and I’ll help you get started.)

About now there is always a question that arises. “Jonathan, I acknowledge that Christianity has given us some great progress, but haven’t there been many horrid things that have been done in the name of Jesus?” And of course, that’s true. That’s because they were done by imperfect, fallen humans. As one of my favourite Christian apologists, Dr. Frank Turek says, **“If you hear someone playing Beethoven badly, you don’t blame Beethoven; you blame the player!”**

4. Pray without ceasing. When engaging with non-Christians, hostile or not, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you with the right words to say and to also know when to speak and when to zip it and listen!

How do we then, individually, put this into action?

I got a call recently from someone who wanted to witness to a somewhat hostile atheist who doesn’t want to hear the Bible quoted and believes it’s an antiquated book of fairy tales. You might understand that this takes some of your ammunition from you but to insist on quoting scripture right off may also terminate the conversation.

Remember, the early church didn’t have the New Testament and the new gentile Christians didn’t know the Old Testament either. And when Paul spoke to the people of Athens in Acts 17, he addressed them in language that they could understand and spoke to their interests and needs. He wasn’t quoting Isaiah or Lamentations, or Amos. He quoted their own Greek poet, Epimenides (***‘in him we live and move and have our being’***) and he spoke sensitively and boldly to them. Some mocked him

(get used to it if you are living boldly) and others joined him and believed.

Something else that is extremely helpful when you are sharing the gospel boldly is to get to know the person you are sharing with. What do they need? What do they believe? How do they view Christianity or their spiritual life?

How do you get that information? Do you think asking questions might be important? And what sorts of questions might you ask?

Questions like, “how did you arrive at that conclusion?” “How do you know that to be true?” “What does that mean to you” and others can help you draw them out. Learn to know them and what makes them tick. Once a door is opened, you might ask, “Have you ever considered..” and then give them another possibility.

Greg Koukl’s classic apologetics book, **“Tactics”** is a good read if you’d like to learn to ask better questions.

By the way, for anyone who is wondering if I am saying to never quote scripture to anyone, of course I’m not saying that. What I am saying is, don’t try to force an idea in to an already made up mind; help the other person to make space for new concepts and new understanding.

As we wrap up here, we do live in an increasingly hostile culture - what we value as Christians is frequently mocked by those who don’t know our Saviour. So how are you and I to respond to mockers, persecution, disdain, or any other nastiness?

Remember the text from 1 Peter 3 where we are to share our faith with gentleness and respect? (Christian Ed example) I don’t know about you, but when I’m under duress that’s not that easy to do but we are to rely on our Saviour, to keep our eyes on him.

When we do that, the Holy Spirit can speak and act through you and me so that we can boldly proclaim our faith. The first Christian martyr, Stephen was stoned to death. In **Acts 7:55** it says, **“Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He said, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”** Stephen’s final words before he died? **“Lord do not hold this sin against them.”** And who was standing there, complicit in the stoning and watching the garments of the witnesses who stoned Stephen? None other than that persecutor of Christians, Saul, later the apostle Paul. Acts 8:1 says **“Saul agreed with putting him to death.”**

I’m wondering if Paul ever revisited that moment, remembering the bold witness of Stephen and I’m curious if this was instructive in any way in his road to Damascus conversion.

Tonight I ask you, are you ready to boldly defend and share your faith, even when it’s uncomfortable, challenging, or a bit scary?

In closing, remember the words of Jesus as he taught his disciples to acknowledge him before the religious authorities. In **Luke 12:11-12** he instructs, **“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”**

Prepare to Live your Christian life boldly and trust in the Holy Spirit to guide you in this sometimes hostile world.