



# HOW CHRIST BUILDS HIS CHURCH

The Sermons of the Book of Acts

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Text: Acts 4:5-12

**Main point:** The Holy Spirit empowers the servants of Christ for Gospel witness in the most intimidating circumstances.

## INTRODUCTION

In this series on **How Christ Builds His Church**, we are opening up the sermons of the Apostles in order to discover *what apostolic preaching is* and *why God was pleased to use it to build His church*. We are not seeking to study **homiletics** (*the art and science of preaching*) or **hermeneutics** (*the art and science of Bible interpretation*), but rather, our aim is to discover the authorial intent of these sermons (i.e., *what the Lord meant by what He said*) and glean from them the life lessons of application for our lives and ministry today. Let me retrace our roadmap to show *where we are* and *what lies ahead* on our journey together.

## REVIEW

The journey began in Matthew 16:18, when Jesus made a promise that concerns you and me. He promised to “*build (oikodomeo—first person active future verb [He and He alone would act]) [His] church; and the gates of Hades (a euphemism for the threat of death) will not overpower it.*” The promise is unconditional and unilateral. The reason for the promise is that His kingdom would be constructed in a *cosmic conflict context*. Our union with Christ fleshes out in a spiritual warzone if you will. Just as the Russians always have an eye on American interests, the devil ever fixes his stare on Christ’s church. Hell’s mission is to hinder the mission, vibrancy, and goal of the church. This is why Paul admonishes us to be on the lookout, “*so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes*” (2 Cor.2:11). Now if Christ promises to *build* His church, and the devil is intent on *blasting* His church, the question is, *how will Christ do it?* What *means* will He use? What *approach* will He take? The book of Acts is written with the express purpose of recording for us, “*all the Jesus began to do and teach*” (Act 1:1).

The birthday of the church was Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), which was first and foremost, *a continuation of Christ’s work in the unfolding drama of redemption, and evidence of Christ’s enthronement*. After Pentecost, we are introduced to...

- **The first preaching** of the Apostles (2:14-40), which brings us to...
- **The first growth** of the church (2:41). Then as a token of power and means of progress, we find recorded...
- **The first miracle** (3:1-10) in which Peter and John are the instruments. This will lead to...
- **The first hostility** from the Sadducees (4:1-23), yet Jesus continued to build His church by adding another 5000 strong! After this message, we will see the increase of spiritual growth in the face of opposition from without, then we will discover...
- **The first defection** from within (5:1-6), out of which the fourth sermon will be given.

In this third sermon, the question I want you to think with me about is...

- Who intimidates you and why? You know what I'm speaking of. This person, because of their *personality, position, or prestige*, causes you to freeze up and feel at a loss for words. This is the person that if you meet them in an elevator, your hands might sweat, and your tongue would be stuck to the roof of your mouth.

What you will discover in this sermon is Christ endows and enables His people to face the most intimidating circumstances or paralyzing fears to be a bold witness for Him! Our text divides into two parts:

Part 1—the intense trial (4:5-6)

Part 2—the incredible testimony (4:7-12)

## EXPOSITION

### A. THE INTENSE TRIAL (vv.5-6)

#### 1. The occasion they encountered

The atmosphere was thick with intensity. As Peter preached that powerful bible-saturated, cross-centered, resurrection-triumphant message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (chapter 3), he and John were quickly confronted with hostility and arrested. The opposition came upon them from three groups according to verse 1.

- As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple *guard* and the Sadducees came up to them,

The words "*came up to them*" convey the idea of hostile intent. The *came up to them* with a force of authority and aggression so as to interrupt what was taking place and to take control of the situation. Notice the three groups involved.

- a. **The priests** were *the religious teachers of the people*, and they were offended because Peter and John were not ordained and sent from their Rabbinical schools (Cf. 4:13).
- b. **The captain of the temple guard** was not a Roman officer, but a Jewish worker who was part of a band of 24 guards who shifted from one watch to another to shut down any disturbances on the temple grounds.

- c. **The Sadducees** were the main culprits in the opposition. They utterly denied belief in the Resurrection from the dead (*Matt.22:23*). These were some of the first people that John the Baptist exposed (*Matt.3:7*), and now they are the first to take an open stand against Peter who just preached the resurrection in the strongest light and with the greatest confidence.

The preaching of the Apostles did not cause some “small” stir to the mind of a few religious people. It “*greatly disturbed*” or highly offended the Sadducees. They were “vexed, indignant, aggrieved” not just because of the doctrine that Peter and John were preaching, but also because the people were being taught by two unofficial, untrained, unskilled men in their estimation.

- <sup>2</sup> being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. <sup>4</sup> But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

**Application: To mediate for a moment on this truth, let me invite you to consider several quotes about opposition and explain what it means FOR you.**

- John Calvin—“*Persecutions are, in a way, seals of adoption to the children of God.*”
- James Milner—“*Persecution often does in this life what the last great day will do completely—separate the wheat from the tares.*”
- William Hendricksen—“*Scars are the price which every believer pays for his loyalty to Christ.*”
- Iain Murray—“*The Word of God never yet prospered in a world without opposition.*”
- Thomas Watson—“*The weight of glory makes persecution light.*”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The intimidation they faced

<sup>5</sup> On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; <sup>6</sup> and Annas the high priest *was there*, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent.

After being in the Eventide, which was an underground holding cell near the Temple, the Apostles were put on trial before the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jewish nation. This is the citadel of Jewish power. To help to understand how intense this scene was, Luke describes the people who were in attendance.

- a. **Their rulers** is Luke’s general way of describing to a Gentile audience that he was speaking of the class of rulers among the Jews—the leading officials.
- b. **The elders** were a class of civil and church officers known among the Jews from the time of the Exodus. Stephen was *condemned* by these elders (6:12) and Paul was *persecuted* by them (23:14,

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<sup>1</sup> John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, pp. 445-46

- 24; 25:15). They were the top men who occupied places of authority in the synagogues and the Sanhedrin. They were the Joint Chiefs of their day and time.
- c. **The scribes** were the writers, expounders, and guardians of the law. The elders represented the people; the scribes represented the spiritual leaders as their chief counsel.
  - d. **Annas, the high priest**, was the father-in-law and predecessor of Caiaphas. The High Priest of Israel by Old Testament law was a lifetime appointment—sort of like a Supreme Court justice. However, this office was shifted at the pleasure of the Romans to flex their political muscles and authority. So, Caiaphas was designated the high priest by the Romans, but under Jewish law, Annas was the high priest, and that's why he is tagged as such in verse 6.
  - e. **Caiaphas** is familiar to us because he is the mastermind behind the plot (conspiracy) to seize Jesus by stealth and to kill Him (*Matt.26:3-4; John 11:47-53*). He is also the one to whom Jesus was taken to first in the trials of Passion week (*John 18:13*).
  - f. Little is known about **John** and **Alexander** except that they were relatives of Annas and Caiaphas.

Luke then adds, "*and all who were of high priestly descent*," to complete the picture set the tone. The leading officials of the highest civil and religious courts in the land had assembled. It is safe to say that anyone of eminence was there at the invitation of Caiaphas and Annas. There was intense excitement in the air. Public sentiments were high. This circus, lead by the ringleaders responsible for putting Christ to death, were agitated by the preaching of His actual resurrection. This is like one of those Senate hearings on Watergate but a thousand times more intense!

**Application:** God knew this situation would arise before it came, and He knows about the situation you face or will encounter in the future. Just as He furnished them with what they needed, He has not been partial in His provisions of what you need as well. Luther prayed, "here I stand; Lord help me." He resolved to stand on God's Word and trust the Lord with the outcome. Are your conviction and conscience firmly planted on the Word of God? For every fear, there is a promise given in God's Word.

The occasion they encountered. The intimidation they faced.

### 3. The question they asked (v.7)

<sup>7</sup>When they had placed them in the center, they *began to inquire*,

The Apostles were placed in open court before the Sanhedrin. The court itself sat on an elevated platform or bench in a semicircle. The pronoun "*them*" there in verse 7 speaks of the lame man *with* the Apostles. And they asked one carefully, thought-out, strategically worded perjury trap in order to "pin them to the mat," as it were, and condemn them with the severest penalty of the law.

- By what power, or in what name, have you done this?

When they asked "**by what power**" they meant, "*Are you claiming that God sent you? Are you suggesting that you have been commissioned by God?*" The Sanhedrin believed that it was their business to test the claims of all who claimed to be operating on a divine mission. If they did not believe that you were truly functioning by God's power, then you were operating by Satan's power, and therefore, you were guilty of sorcery and worthy of death. This is what they accused Jesus of during His ministry (*Matt.12:22-29; 21:23-27*).

When they asked, "**or in what name**" they knew all about those Jewish exorcists who invoked the name of the patriarchs or God in their exorcisms (*Acts 19:14-16*). It was a good old fashion perjury trap. A name represents all that a person is.

If they answered, "by the power of God," they would have been condemned as false prophets. If they answered, "by the name of some other foreign deity or father from the past," they would have been condemned as sorcerers or magicians dabbling in the witchcraft or deception. Remember, they believed in Satanic miracles (*Ex.7:8-13*).

One last note under this heading that brings out the *disdain* and *hostility*, as well as the *opportunity* that Peter seized upon. On the last part of the question, "*by what power, or in what name, **have you done this?***" The pronoun "**you**" is emphatic, which means: you of all people! They were saying, "Who are you of all people, to have "**done this?**" It was not the teaching or the preaching of the resurrection that they were opposing, as much as, what the miracle said about them. We don't question the *miracle*; we question *what* or *who* it points to. We question what it signifies about you. That a miracle took place is not an issue, but *how* it was done, now that's the issue. This is the same opposition they brought to Christ after His miracles (*John 5:30-36*).

**Application:** What do your actions, your schedule, and your priorities say about you? How do they point to the One you profess to know and love?

## **B. THE INCREDIBLE TESTIMONY (vv.8-12)**

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, <sup>9</sup> if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. <sup>11</sup> He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone*. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter's response sets before us what Christ-centered, apostolic preaching looks like.

In the first two messages, we've discovered that apostolic preaching was text-driven, Christ-centered, and heart-piercing preaching. It emphasized the fulfillment of the Old Testament, the centrality of the cross, the reality of the resurrection, the surety of Lordship, the necessity of repentance, and the certainty of judgment.

Now, in this sermon, we discover four more marks.

## What is Christ-centered, apostolic preaching?

### 1. Christ-centered preaching is *Spirit-filled preaching*. (v.8a)

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them,

The Apostle Peter was a man under the *control* and *rule* of the Holy Spirit. He was *governed, gripped, and guided* by the Spirit. He was *empowered* and *emboldened* by the Spirit of God.

The filling of the Holy Spirit is the occasion of every great witness for the Gospel (*Acts 2:4; 4:8; 13:9; Eph.5:18; Luke 1:15*). This is what it looks like. His mind will be enlightened with clarity on *what* to say and *how* to say it. This is actually a fulfillment of the very words of Christ given in Matthew 10:16-20,

- <sup>16</sup> “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup> But beware of men, for they will hand you over to *the courts* and scourge you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup> and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but *it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*”

**Application:** Peter never had a class on how to respond this way. This describes an experience in response to the promise of Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit. Do you have the Spirit’s indwelling? Has He made your heart His home?

### 2. Christ-centered preaching is *bold, plain-spoken preaching*. (vv.8b-10)

- Rulers and elders of the people, <sup>9</sup> if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health.

Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, apostolic preaching is *bold*, not *brazen* or *abrasive*. It is *plain*, not *political*. The native Americans said of a duplicitous person, “he speak with fork in tongue.” But there is no division, doubt, or deception in what the Apostle is declaring. Proverbs 28:1 says, “*The righteous are bold as a lion,*” and this is the demeanor God expects from His children.

The word “boldness” (*parresia*) actually means *all-speech or plainness of speech; it conceals nothing and or passes over nothing. It is not freedom from confinement, but liberty or courage to speak the Gospel plainly.* Gospel preaching is clear and courageous. Peter is crystal-clear. Fearless. If you want to know how, he says, “**...it is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene...whom you crucified.**”

There is no stuttering or innuendo. There are no implications—just a straight-out indictment. Peter says, I want you to be clear that I am speaking about the very One that you know—“*Jesus Christ the Nazarene...whom you crucified.*” It was you who persecuted and executed Him, in the first degree, predetermined murder; in cold-blooded fashion. It is His name!

Oh, what weightiness Christ-centered preaching carries! Apostolic Gospel preaching is not *politically correct*. The Apostle Peter does not speak in *vague generalities*. He is not speaking about “*the Higher Power*,” “*the Man upstairs*,” or “*the Deity*.” He directly and clearly speaks about Jesus, who is the offense. You murdered Him! You are responsible for the bloody deed! But what you did, God reversed! Your effort to stop Him failed! “...*God raised Him*.”

In other words, dead men do not heal people! Dead men do not raise sick people. Christ is alive! It is futile to resist Him! Like a little boy shouting at waves of the ocean: stop moving! It is vain and foolish to deny Him. This is what apostolic preaching is. *Specific. Clear. Unapologetic. Commanding. Indicting. Authoritative. And convicting.*

Again, the keynotes of the *crucifixion* and the *resurrection* are struck! Peter is unabashed, unembarrassed, and unmistakable. Is our witness as clear as theirs? Is it as clear as fresh water, or is it cloudy and uncertain?

### **What will be the effect of Spirit-filled, bold, plain-spoken preaching?**

It was so clear and bold that it turned Peter’s trial into their trial! The roles had reversed at once! In the very judgment hall of the Sanhedrin, their criminality was exposed. The *persecuted* became the *prosecutor*. The very man who earlier at the trial of the Lord was *so afraid* that he denied Jesus when questioned by a little girl, now *refuses to shrink back* in the face of this high court of murderers. What was it that gave him such boldness? It was the reality of the resurrection of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit! It was Christ fulfilling His promise.

**Application:** This is the kind of steadfastness and boldness that comes with spiritual growth and Christian maturity. Listen to the writer of Hebrews.

- **Hebrews 10:37-39**—FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE,  
HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.  
<sup>38</sup> BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH;  
AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.  
<sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Where is your confidence in the face of those who hate Christ? Will you prove yourself to be one who has faith or froth?

### 3. Christ-centered preaching is *prophetic preaching* (v.11)

- <sup>11</sup> He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but* WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*.

By *prophetic*, I don’t mean that Peter is pulling something *out of the air* or from his own head and saying that God gave him a word! No, he quotes from Psalm 118:22, a passage that had already been cited by Christ, a week before His crucifixion, as applying to Himself (*Matt.21:42-46*).

The reason Peter quotes this verse is to show them that *the death of Christ*, of which they played a part, *was all a part of the Old Testament*. It was not new news. The Apostles understood that Stone was a reference to Christ. **“He is the Stone which was rejected...”**

- **Ephesians 2:20**—having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,

Then he drills down on the second person plural when he says...**“by you, the builders...”**

He indicts them as *the builders* referred to in this ancient Psalm.

Now it was the responsibility of the Jewish leaders, as *builders*, to select the proper building stones. But when the stones were delivered to them by God from the quarry which God dug, there was *one Stone* that they deemed *unfit* and *undesirable*, and it was *the Stone—the Lord Jesus Christ*. Now, why did they reject Him? Isaiah 53:2 prophesied that it was because His birth was unimpressive and His background was unattractive.

- For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,  
And like a root out of parched ground;  
He has no *stately* form or majesty  
That we should look upon Him,  
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.

In addition to this, there was a misunderstanding of His life so that He was treated as insignificant and unwanted.

- <sup>3</sup> He was despised and forsaken of men,  
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
And like one from whom men hide their face  
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

To accept Him would mean that they would have to *repent of their sins*. It would mean to *surrender the control of their lives* and their *agendas*. The same is true for us.

These Jewish leaders were so caught up in *their own building campaign, their own kingdom, their own religion* that they rejected God’s Cornerstone, the Lord Jesus Christ. Although these leaders had refused to build upon *Him*, nevertheless, He had become the Cornerstone. Their rejection of Christ went on to prove His identity. **“...but which became the Chief Corner stone.”**

In this metaphor, there is a Master Builder, and His name is *God the Father*. He is the Chief-Architect who has drawn at the Masterplan of Redemption. It was a plan written in eternity past. It was signed by an eternal decree. And the centerpiece of the plan was the Lord Jesus Christ.

As He would be *discarded, despised, and rejected* by the builders, the Master Builder (God the Father) would pick this very Stone and by His sovereignty, place this Stone *in the Chief place* to begin His new creation project called the church.

- **1 Peter 2:4-6**—And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, <sup>5</sup> you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For *this* is contained in Scripture:  
 "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*,  
 AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

The Chief Cornerstone is always laid first. No other stone can be laid until this one is set in its place.

- **1 Corinthians 3:11**—For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Once *this Stone* is in place, then the Master Builder will make two walls out of that Cornerstone and fill it in. The same is true in our lives. Nothing will be in place in your life until a real, warm, personal relationship with Christ is in place. Once the Cornerstone is laid, every other stone will find its place in relationship to the Chief Cornerstone. Then every column, beam, archway, and wall will be in the proper place.

God, in His wisdom and genius, determined that Jesus, the rejected Stone, would be very Chief Cornerstone upon which His house would be built.

**Application:** What does this mean for us? It means there must be an alignment of your heart, mind, choices, preferences, and even liberties with Jesus. To the extent that we are rightly aligned with Christ, will be the extent that it will be well with our soul, our ministry, and our fellowship as His people.

Christ-centered, apostolic preaching is Spirit-filled preaching.

Christ-centered, apostolic preaching is bold, plain-spoken preaching.

Christ-centered, apostolic preaching is prophetic preaching.

#### 4. Christ-centered preaching is *polemical preaching*. (v.12)

<sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Apologetics *defends* the faith; polemics *deconstructs* the opposing worldview against which we stand. Apologetics and polemics are two players on the same field of the Gospel advance. Christ-centered preaching does not just say, *here is the proof of what we believe*. It must go on to say, *here is where you are wrong, why you are wrong, and the consequences of your wrong belief*.

The Apostle could have said, "Well, I know we are in disagreement about Jesus, but there is a way to be saved if you are under the Old Covenant and a different way under the New Covenant." He could have said, "We Jews can be saved one way, and Gentiles are saved another way." As a matter of fact, later on, in a weak moment of compromise and hypocrisy, Paul had to confront Peter because he was not "*straightforward about the truth of the gospel*" (Gal.2:11-16).

But in this case, Peter stood firm. Filled with the Spirit. Clear. Plain. Prophetic. He stood before these men who orchestrated the death of Christ, and said, "there is an exclusivity in salvation in the name of Christ."

**"There is salvation is no one else..."** Do you see any room for negotiation in that statement? He is not speaking about growth, illumination, or education, but salvation. There is **"salvation"** meaning *deliverance from condemnation or damnation and the very wrath of God Himself*. There is no other escape from judgment than the one which I am declaring to you today.

Salvation is not found in *Abraham, Moses, or David*. It is not found in *Buddha, Mohammed, Hare Krishna, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Mary Baker Eddy, Rev. Moon, the Dali Lama, the Pope, the Virgin Mary*, or any other name. It is not found in anything else—not in *temple sacrifices, phylactery boxes*, or even *the Bible itself* (Jn.5:39). It is not found in *rosary beads, baptism, membership, good works, sacrificial giving, moral living, or official positions* in the church. It is ONLY in the Name of Jesus Christ!

There is only one name in which, under which, and through which we may be saved.

He is the God-appointed and anointed Savior of the world. He is commissioned by the Father, offered to You, and He is coming again with salvation to those who believe and condemnation to those who reject Him.

- **John 14:6**—Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
- **1 Timothy 2:5**—For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

When seeking to ascertain a person's level of understanding about salvation, we don't need to ask them, "*Are you saved?*" We need to ask, "*From what are you saved?*" Peter declares: salvation is found not in *your faith plus your works, or your faith plus your membership, or your faith plus your faithfulness, but your faith in Christ alone plus nothing!*

Who can break the power of canceled sin?

Who can set the prisoners free?

Whose blood can make the foulest clean?

Whose blood availed before God for you and me?

Who can take the scroll and break the seals?

Is He worthy? Is He worthy? Is He worthy of all this? HE IS! HE IS! HE IS!

All hail the power of Jesus' name! Let angels prostrate fall.

Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all.

Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown Him Lord of all!

O seed of Israel's chosen race now ransomed from the fall,

hail Him who saves you by his grace, and crown Him Lord of all.

Hail Him who saves you by his grace, and crown Him Lord of all!

Let every tongue and every tribe on this terrestrial ball,

to Him all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of all.

To Him, all majesty ascribe, and crown Him Lord of all!

Oh, that with all the sacred throng we at His feet may fall!  
We'll join the everlasting song and crown Him Lord of all.  
We'll join the everlasting song and crown Him Lord of all.<sup>2</sup>

## APPLICATION

- What *instruction* does this sermon reinforce?
- What *error* does this sermon refute?
- What *prohibition* does this sermon forbid?
- What *commitment* does this sermon declare?
- What *examination* does this sermon call for?
- What *duty* does this sermon require?

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Perronet, *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*