

Bold

Acts 4:1-31 on October 25, 2020

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Please read Acts 2:1-22 before reading further in this transcript.

Last week we talked about the phrase, “in Jesus’ name.” Jesus’ name is about so much more than... well... just His name. It’s about the majesty of His person, His power, and the authority of His teaching. In Acts 4, we’re going to find 2 VERY different reactions to Jesus’ name. One reaction is very much opposed to Jesus, the other is very much in support. What we WON’T find is any middle ground. There is no equivocation or compromise, no meeting in the middle. When it comes to issues of faith, it’s quite popular in our modern-day society, for people to make an appeal for middle ground. There are any number of modern voices that are NEITHER completely FOR nor completely AGAINST Jesus. For example, many people would agree that Jesus was a good person. They would even agree that He has some important things to teach us. But many people today become very uncomfortable with some of the intolerant statements that we find in the Bible. Like the one we find in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Statements like these seem awfully elitist, awfully arrogant and out of place, in our modern-day culture of tolerance, acceptance, and equality. Today’s text will show us that there is no place for theological ambiguity or “wishy-washiness” when it comes to what Christ-followers believe about Jesus. Today’s text calls Christ-followers to take a BOLD stand for our faith in Jesus. To be courageous. To have a strong, unflinching, PERSONAL CONVICTION about how great Jesus is. How His name ALONE is the ONLY name “by which we MUST be saved.” By which we CAN be saved.

Please open your Bible to Acts 4:1-2. As we move through some of these narrative sections in the book of Acts, we won’t always have a neat outline with 3 main points. Instead, as we move through the flow of the story, we’ll make observations and applications along the way. Acts 4 is a direct continuation of the story we began last week in Acts 3. In fact, we kind of stopped right in the middle. For those of you who haven’t heard that message, Acts 3 records an incredible miracle. The Apostles, Peter and John, were going up to the temple at the time of prayer. A lame man had been carried there so that he could sit and beg for money. Rather than giving him money though, Peter heals him IN JESUS’ NAME. The man not only walks for the first time in his life, but he starts jumping, which draws a crowd. Peter and John then clarify that he wasn’t healed by THEIR power but rather by the powerful name of Jesus. Peter then points this group of his fellow Jews to Jesus. And he clarifies that Jesus is the promised Messiah. He tells them that even though they killed their own Messiah, God raised Him up and sent Him to the Jews 1st, in order to bless them by turning them from their wicked ways. In fact, it’s DURING this very message that they are interrupted.

The story continues in Acts 4:1-2, “The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” Now, we’d expect there to be priests at the temple. But the temple guard might surprise us a bit. They were there to keep an eye on the thousands of people filtering in and out of the temple, to make sure there wasn’t any trouble. But today there appeared to be some trouble. The captain of the temple guard was more than a little concerned about this guy jumping around; this was NOT typical temple behavior. We also discover that the Sadducees were there. The Sadducees were an interesting sect within Judaism. They were kind of the temple elites. There were both rich and powerful. This Jewish sect was more political than religious. They had a vested interest in preserving the status quo and appeasing the Roman authorities.¹ Theologically, they didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead, which is one of the key things that Peter and John were teaching. Their focus was on their current life because they didn’t believe in the afterlife.² Because of their current

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Vol. 5*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, pp. 211, 213.

² In fact, there’s an easy way to remember this: the Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead, that’s why they were “sad you see.”

wealth and power, their lives were actually already incredibly good. They didn't feel much of a need for a Messiah. In fact, there were among a subsection of the Jews who weren't even looking for the return of the Messiah.³ Understanding all of this about the Sadducees helps to explain why they arrested Peter/John. They "saw the apostles as both agitators and heretics, both disturbers of the peace and enemies of the truth." So they threw them in jail for the night.

Right after we learn about this, Acts 4:4 reassures us "But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand." The number 5,000 was up about 2,000 from the initial 3,000 who came to faith at Pentecost. So, the message that Peter preached in Acts 3 had such a powerful impact, that some 2,000 Jews came to faith in Jesus at the temple. In other words, despite this opposition from the Sadducees, the word of God was not hindered. They had the authority to lock up the apostles, but they could NOT lock up the gospel!⁴

Acts 4:5-6 goes on, "The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family." Now, Annas and Caiaphas were very familiar with Jesus.⁵ In fact, both of them had played a key role in the trial and condemnation of Jesus... memories of Jesus' trial may very well have been flooding through the apostles' minds, making them wonder, would they be handed over to the Romans too, and be crucified the way Jesus was?⁶

When verse 5 mentions the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law, it's a reference to the Sanhedrin.⁷ This group was made up of far more than just Sadducees. It was "the high court of the Jews... Its total membership numbered 71... Under Roman jurisdiction the Sanhedrin was given a GREAT deal of authority."⁸ So, let's make sure we are getting a clear picture of what's going on here: Peter and John stood before a VERY imposing semi-circle of 71 of Israel's most prominent and powerful religious leaders.⁹ Can you picture 71 men seated in a semi-circle across the front platform in our church sanctuary? Acts 4:7 tells us, "They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?" Talk about an intimidating scenario! Do you think that Peter was maybe a little nervous about what to say? Well, actually, no, I don't think he was. At least, not as long as he remembered what Jesus' had promised them back in Matthew 10:19-20, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Watch how this is fulfilled in Acts 4:8 and following, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...."

You see, Jesus had promised them the Holy Spirit and He delivered on that promise; so Peter lets them have it! "...Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed." (*Acts 4:8-10*) NOW THAT'S BOLD!

Just like back in Acts 3, Peter uses this opportunity to point to Jesus. He quotes from Psalm 118:22, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."¹⁰ In fact, Jesus quoted this same Psalm back in Matthew 21:42 when He Himself was being confronted by some of the same religious authorities.¹¹ Just like Jesus, Peter was telling these religious leaders that Jesus was "the stone" THEY had rejected. And furthermore, that Jesus had now become the cornerstone. Jesus was

³ "Theologically, they believed that the Messianic age had begun in the Maccabean period; so they were not looking for a Messiah." John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1990, p. 95.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1990, p. 96.

⁵ See Matthew 26:3-4 and John 18:13.

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1990, p. 96.

⁷ Consider Numbers 11:16-17, possibly the origin of the Sanhedrin, where 70 men come alongside Moses (making 71) to share the workload AND the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1689 footnote on Mark 14:55.

⁹ "The members are said to have sat in a semicircle in order that all might see one another, while in front of them on the right and left two scribes were positioned, who kept a written record of the testimony for acquittal or conviction." Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Vol. 5*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, p. 271.

¹⁰ See also Isaiah 28:16.

¹¹ Read Matthew 21:23-46 for the full context.

the foundation upon which the early church was being built. Peter then lands his knock-out punch in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Notice the double negative here “no one else” and “no other name.” Peter is emphasizing this simple but pertinent truth: Jesus is unique. He is not like or similar to or comparable with ANYONE ELSE.

The source of Peter’s bold confidence was obvious, even to the religious leaders who were opposing him. Acts 4:13 tells us, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” What an incredible testimony to the genuineness of their faith. Jesus had made such a TRANSFORMATIVE impact on them, that even their opponents could see it.¹² Brother or Sister in Christ, have we been with Jesus this way? Do our times with Jesus make such a TRANSFORMATIVE impact on us, that it’s blatantly obvious to everyone who meet us?¹³

The Sanhedrin considered them unschooled, “ordinary” men, but there’s NOTHING ordinary about someone whose life has been transformed by Jesus. “Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinic schools, nor did they hold official positions in recognized religious circles.”¹⁴ We should make a note of this: the key to having a bold, courageous faith, won’t be having a title like “Apostle” or “pastor.” It won’t be our schooling or having knowledge of the original Greek and Hebrew. It won’t be about having a Master of Divinity degree or an ordination certificate. The key to having a bold, courageous faith, will be our time spent with Jesus.¹⁵

Before Peter can say another word, they order him to step out of the room, so they can confer with each other. There was nothing that these 71 religious leaders could say; the miraculous healing of the lame man was UNDENIABLE. Acts 4:16 says, “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it.” Acts 4:18 informs us of their decision, “Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” Even with irrefutable proof, some hearts remain hard to the gospel. Even in the face of UNDENIABLE evidence, they are some people who will still reject Jesus. They will band together and double down. This just goes to show that some people just don’t want to believe. They’re stuck in their own ways and they’re too stubborn to see what’s right in front of them; what would be SO good for them.¹⁶

Does verse 18 sound a little ridiculous to anyone else? “Don’t speak or teach AT ALL in the name of Jesus.” Really? After they had just witnessed direct evidence of the power of Jesus’ name?¹⁷ Ridiculous! In effect, these religious leaders were saying: “Let us experts do the teaching. After all, you guys are just simple fisherman; you have no business trying to teach the Bible!” As one author puts it, “this was ‘unauthorized preaching by unprofessional preachers.’”¹⁸ At this point, let’s keep in mind one of the key distinctives about the early church back in Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” Pastor Eric preached on this two weeks ago. The Apostles’ teaching is one of the key patterns that carries forward from the early church to our modern-day churches. So even though the Sanhedrin planned to block their teaching, God’s plan was to use the Apostles’ teaching to create our New Testament Bible. Aren’t you glad, that they disobeyed the command in verse 18?

¹² Let’s keep in mind that Peter’s faith didn’t begin by being courageous. See Peter’s early encounter with Jesus in Luke 5:1-11.

¹³ Consider the Apostle Paul’s words in Philippians 3:3-7, 8-11, “... What is more, I consider everything a loss because of ***the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord***, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ***I want to know Christ...***”

¹⁴ Of course, neither was Jesus. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1831 footnote on Acts 4:13.

¹⁵ Consider Romans 12:11.

¹⁶ By the way, interestingly enough, these religious leaders make no attempt to discredit the apostles’ claim that Jesus rose from the dead. Even though this was the very center of Peter and John’s message, we don’t find the Sanhedrin trying to produce any evidence that would discredit their claims about Jesus rising from the dead. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1990, p. 98.

¹⁷ A key distinction that is clarified in this miraculous healing in Acts 3 is that the power is DIRECTLY related to the name of Jesus. Just as Jesus healed people through His own earthly ministry, He now continues to heal them in/through the ongoing ministry of the Apostles. In other words, we find evidence once again for the CONTINUING ministry of Jesus even after His death, resurrection, and ascension.

¹⁸ Quoting Neil, John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1990, p. 96.

Peter and John give a BOLD reply in Acts 4:19-20, "...Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah says it this way in Jeremiah 20:9, "But if I say, 'I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." You see, no matter how much reluctance or fear or apprehension we might feel, about BOLDLY speaking God's word, His Spirit compels us. Brother or Sister in Christ, how about us? Can we feel His word in our hearts like a fire, like fire shut up in our bones? How can we help but speak about what we have seen and heard?¹⁹

After further threats, the Sanhedrin lets them go. Let's pick up our Scripture reading in Acts 4:23 and following: "On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord,' they said, 'you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.' 27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'" 31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

What would it be like if our church prayed this way this morning, and God shook our building? Of course, in one way, that would be incredible! But, in another way, it would shake us to our core! It would shake us out of any apathy, out of any spiritual lethargy. After reading this incredible account in Acts 4, about bold and courageous faith, some of us are probably feeling pretty pumped up. And that's a good thing! Praise God! Let's go! But others of us may be feeling a little more intimidated. We might be thinking to ourselves: "Pastor Jerry, I'm not the BOLDEST person. Courage is great, but I'm a more timid person." That's a reasonable response. But I would encourage any Christ-follower who is feeling a little overwhelmed or uncomfortable with today's passage, to reconsider boldness. Boldness can look very different from one person to the next. God hasn't called every Christ-follower, to stand in front of a group of 71 leaders, and call them out for rejecting Jesus. God does however call every one of us, to be bold witnesses in our own sphere of influence, using the gifting and opportunities that He puts in front of us.²⁰

This year I witnessed one of the greatest acts of boldness I've ever seen in all my years of following Jesus. It was at Josh Bahr's funeral back in July. Those of you who were here, know that toward the end of the service, Josh's mom, Joy Bahr, stood up and shared a few words. Joy spoke with BOLD, courageous words. But when Joy spoke, it was in her everyday, soft-spoken voice. She didn't yell or shout or put on an act. She spoke from her heart. She declared the importance of trusting Jesus alone. She made it clear that there is no other name, other than Jesus, by which we must be saved. So, if someone as timid and shy as Joy Bahr can BOLDLY proclaim Jesus, then surely you and I can.

If you're not someone who is naturally bold and outgoing, then let me offer you this suggestion: It's ok to be a little more introverted. Being bold doesn't always mean being pushy or getting up in someone's face. If you are lacking in boldness, spend some time with Jesus this week talking with Him about that. Ask Him to help you be BOLD and COURAGEOUS in accordance with the way that He has designed you. In whatever way, that best fits YOUR personality and YOUR opportunities.

Just like the believers in the early church, ALL of us should pray that God will fill us with the Holy Spirit in such a way that we are able to speak the word of God boldly.

¹⁹ In 1 Corinthians 9:16, Paul says, "...I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

²⁰ Consider Ephesians 5:15-16, 6:19-20, and Colossians 4:5-6.