

BOLD WITNESSES

Acts 4:5-31

Last time we were in Acts we talked about how God has a plan to bring restoration to people's lives through faith in Christ. And we saw how He desires to use you and me in that plan, to be **His witnesses to advance the gospel** and restore men to God (Acts 1:8). I guess you could say we're all in the restoration business. But with the restoration business comes the amazing privilege of sharing the gospel with people and that's not always an easy thing for us. Most of us are too familiar with feeling inadequate, unprepared, and a pit in our stomach that comes just before we share the gospel because we know that the name of Jesus is something that can either bring incredible joy to people who believe or derision from those who don't.

That's what happened in chapter 3 as Peter and John shared the good news of Jesus. Many believed, but some of the religious leaders didn't and the first persecution against the Church began. And as we pick it up in chapter 4 we're going to learn some insights as to how we can be **bold** witnesses for Jesus. Not bold as in arrogant, obnoxious, self-confident. But bold as in the just **confident in the Lord, courageous, or frankness**. Just being straight forward about people's need for Jesus in a sincere way. We pick it up in **verse 5**.

“On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 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. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 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.”

I. THE COUNCIL'S EXAMINATION. (VV. 5-12)

Peter and John are in jail overnight and the next day they have to stand before **the same Council that Jesus stood before**. It's a highly corrupted civil and religious Jewish council known as the **Sanhedrin** made up of 70 leading men in Israel. It's like Israel's supreme court. They would sit in a semi-circle type of court with those on trial standing in the middle.

And this trial is within their jurisdiction because the Mosaic Law specified that whenever someone performed a **miracle** and used it for **teaching**, they were to be **examined**. If their teaching was used to lead men astray from the God of Israel, they were responsible to stone them (Deut. 13:1-5).¹ So the question, *“What power or name have you performed this in?”* is a loaded question.

They have to prove their teaching and miracle is connected with Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of their fathers. That’s why Peter connects Jesus with Old Testament prophecy.

Notice Peter’s reply comes as he is “*filled with the Spirit.*” Something I want to reiterate throughout Acts is that **every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe.** Clear New Testament teaching affirms it is *impossible* to be a Christian and not be indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14). However, to be **filled with the Holy Spirit** is to say that a believer is controlled or empowered by the Holy Spirit.

BAPTISM (INDWELLING)	FILLING
Occurs once in each believer’s life	Is a repeated experience
Never happened before Pentecost	Occurred in the Old Testament
True of all believers	Not necessarily experienced by all
Cannot be undone	Can be lost
Results in position	Results in power/enablement
Occurs the moment we believe	Occurs throughout the Christian life
No Prerequisite (except faith in Christ)	Depends on yieldedness

They are not legalists, walking by performance-based standards or licentious, walking by the desires of the sin nature (Galatians 5:13-26). They are walking by the Spirit through faith in Christ (Gal. 2:20), yielding their lives to God and depending on Him.

Bold (confident) witnesses are Spirit-filled.

We’ll get to this later but **verse 31** says Spirit-filled believers proclaim the word of God with boldness. When we go to share the gospel, we need to make sure we’re yielding to and depending on the Spirit of God to work through His inspired Word. That’ll go a long way in calming our nerves when we understand it doesn’t all depend on us. Yes, we want to present the gospel simply and clearly, but we know that God’s Spirit must convict them of their need for a Savior as they consider God’s Word. We need to trust God and be confident in Him and **leave the results to God.**

I had the opportunity to apply this this week and it works. You just trust God. No need to be overprepared – just relax and get to know the person and where they’re at – ask questions – and you’ll start to sense which Scriptures will help lead them to Jesus. But notice as well, Spirit-filled preaching and teaching and witnessing doesn’t guarantee outcomes. Peter is filled with the Spirit and these men still refuse to acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior in our passage.

Let’s look more at his response in **verse 10**: “*Let it be known to you and everyone else in Israel that this miracle was done by the power and name of Jesus, the Messiah you crucified.*” He also references **Psalms 118**. Psalm 118 was a familiar psalm to this group. It was a Passover psalm, which they just recited the night before they crucified Jesus. What’s interesting is they believed Israel was the cornerstone that was rejected which would become the chief cornerstone. However, it is not Israel, but Jesus – and they fulfilled that psalm by rejecting Him.

Today we build our buildings out of sticks and screws and drywall. But back then they built using stone. And when they started they would lay one large stone and set it in place and that would be the stone they use to measure from and angle the rest of the stones laid. Jesus is like that stone.

Peter says in 1 Peter 2:4, *“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, you also, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,” and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out.”*

Jesus is the Cornerstone that we measure everything else by. He is the standard. And we either believe in Him and are connected to Him or if you don’t believe you trip over Him or when He comes He falls on them and they are crushed (Matthew 21:44). That’s why sharing the gospel is difficult at times. We know how important it is and yet we live in a **universalistic** and **relativistic** world that wants to think that all roads lead to God and don’t try to force “your truth” on anyone. But that’s really illogical if Jesus claimed to God and that He’s the only way. He’s either is or He’s not. But it becomes a very unpopular concept because it upsets that status quo.

Our culture is increasingly against the **exclusive claim** of Christ. And it is possible that there will come a time when saying that Jesus is the only way will be considered hate speech and illegal – it’s just too exclusive. It’s like that in places in the world already. But **we cannot stop**. It’s the **most essential message** in the world that meets the **most essential need** – for people to be saved from their sins through faith in Christ and restored to everlasting life with God.

Peter is bold here, putting his life on the line for his testimony of Jesus. Which is more amazing considering that when Jesus was on trial before this same group a couple months ago, Peter was terrified and denied Jesus before a slave girl. He was **under fire at the fire** and now **he’s on fire for Jesus**. He turns the table of accusation around on them and puts them on trial before God. *“You’re accusing us of doing something good in your Messiah’s name, while you crucified Him.”*

Bold witnesses live for eternal matters.

But Peter is confident because he knows that this life is not all there is. Jesus has conquered death, the Spirit has come... He’s not living for this life anymore or for his own glory. He has something far more worthy and eternal to live for than just living a comfortable life now. **He has a hill worth dying on – a mission worth giving his life for:** sharing the good news that Jesus so that all who believe have everlasting life, even if it means giving his life for it. People who really grasp the gospel know that *“To live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21).

II. THE COUNCIL'S RESOLUTION. (VV. 13-18)

“Now as they observed the confidence [many translations read, boldness] of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. But when they had ordered them to leave the Council, they began to confer with one another, saying, “What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name.” And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”

You have to enjoy somewhat the Council's resolution because with the man standing before them and the apostles using Scripture to prove their point, *“they had nothing to say in reply.”* It was undeniable! They can't deny the resurrection or the miracle that just took place.

In **verse 13**, we see two enjoyable **observations** they make about them. For **one**, they were amazed at the apostles because they were **uneducated and untrained men**, meaning they weren't trained in the rabbinical schools or ordained teachers or have special training in the Scriptures. They were **common** people, country boys from Galilee, but what makes the difference is that **they have the Holy Spirit and have been with Jesus**. It's funny to think that Jesus is still stumping the religious leaders through them. Acts is about Jesus continuing to “act” through the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bold witnesses are common people who know Jesus.

Don't think you have to have some sort of special training to share the gospel. Just keep it simple. We spent a whole sermon in the last half of Acts 1 studying how these people who advance the gospel are ordinary men and women like you and me from all backgrounds with their own failures and problems. But they are willing and available and empowered by God's grace towards them.

A good question to ask ourselves would be, *“Do people look at our lives and say, ‘They've been with Jesus. They're Christlike.’* That's the goal of spiritual maturity: not just head-knowledge but Christlikeness. Romans 8:28-30 reveals **God's purpose for our lives** is to conform us to the image of His Son.

Sometimes people will be drawn to that Christlike light in you but often it repels the darkness. **The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay**. In this passage, the religious leaders are hardened. They confer with one another and warn them not to speak in the name of Jesus again or teach at all in His name. **Evangelism officially becomes illegal**. *What would you do in this situation?* I'm guessing based on the way **these disciples ran and hid 2 months ago** when Jesus was arrested, they're expecting them to cower again.

III. THE DISCIPLES' RESPONSE. (VV. 19-31)

“But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.”

The apostles’ response must have surprised the rulers a bit by this. They didn’t cower and they were using their own argument. The religious leaders were used to responding to Roman authority with the same line, *“We must obey God rather than men.”* In other words, **the law of God supersedes the law of man.** But the point for boldness is made: obedience to God comes first.

1st Response: The disciples prioritize obedience to God.

Obedience to God comes first because **God is the ultimate Judge we will answer too.** Whenever a figure of authority tells us to do something that brings us into **direct conflict** with God’s commands, at that point, resistance is necessary and we entrust our lives to God. Just because something is legal, like abortion, doesn’t mean we start. Just because something is illegal, like preaching the gospel, doesn’t mean we stop. We obey God. As His witnesses, *“We cannot stop speaking about what we’ve seen and heard.”* That’s what witnesses do. They’ve experienced the life changing power of Christ and part of sharing Christ with people is just sharing how He has worked in your life. It’s critical that we do because **if verse 12 is true there is nothing more important than sharing the hope and salvation found in Christ. No Jesus = no hope.**

As a result of their stance, the Council responds to them with **further threatening.** Humanly speaking, part of what saved the apostles’ tail this day was the favor they had with the people (v. 21). But notice their second response of **spiritual instinct** in **verses 23-31: prayer.** This is a monumental prayer in the Bible. It has always stood out to me.

“When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.’

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”

2nd Response: The disciples take the situation to God in prayer.

So the disciples return to the core group of believers and do what came naturally to a probably a terrified group: **they prayed**. But notice the key element to their prayer. They acknowledge **God's sovereignty**. They acknowledge that God is Creator, meaning He is greater than anyone. That what happened to Jesus was predestined to occur. They know God is in control.

They also quote **Psalm 2**, which goes along with that thought. It's a **Divine Kingship** Psalm ultimately about the end times when earthly kings gather against Christ at His return, but they draw application from it now. This psalm depicts God in heaven ruling over above the puny kings of earth in laughter. *"He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them"*.

And note that they don't ask Jesus to remove all threats but **to take note of the threats and grant them boldness**. If we're going to be bold witnesses, we've got to pray. Prayer brings **power and perspective**. Perspective to say, *"God is in control and I'm content with God's will, whatever form it takes."*ⁱⁱ We express our trust in God and refuse to live in fear of man (Jer. 17:7-8).

And notice how **God responds** to their prayer with a good shake. Not a hand shake. He **shakes the place** they are gathered in to say in this unique time, *"I hear you. I'm with you. My Spirit is with you though you can't see Him."* I love His early affirmations that He's with the Church and the apostles like that. Next time He'll affirm His presence as they deal with corruption from within.

The last verse today, **verse 31**, brings us full circle. They were filled with the Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. *"What does it look like to be filled with the Spirit?"* There you have it. *Are we a Spirit-filled Church?* Are we actively, prayerfully looking for opportunities to share the gospel with those around us? Remember this wasn't anything flashy or fancy. They just do their best to help people understand why Jesus is the only way. Keep it simple and trust the Lord to do His thing. Don't overthink it. Ask questions so you know where they're at and how you can help them understand what Jesus did for them. Yeah, some people won't believe it. But there's nothing like the look of joy and hope in the eyes of someone who does believe for the first time and says, in a world of religious confusion, *"That makes sense. I get it now. I want to trust Christ."*

If you're here today and you're afraid to die because you know something is not right between you and God, you need to know that you were made for a relationship with Him as Genesis 1-2 reveals. However, our sinful disobedience to holy God has caused a separation between us resulting in death. We are born spiritually dead and will die physically. However God so loved you that He came into this world, never deserving of death because He never sinned, and He died in your place for your sins so that by faith in Him, in Jesus, you could be born again to everlasting life. I would encourage you and plead with you today to trust in Jesus as your Savior. If you need more help understanding that, don't be afraid to ask. It's your eternal destiny we're dealing with here.

ⁱ Homer A. Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1972), 45-46.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 48.