

Speaking Boldly About Jesus

By John Ulrich, Lead Pastor

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Acts 4:1-22

You know - sometimes - silence can be a struggle. Sometimes it can be difficult to break the silence. You may have heard about the man and his wife that were having a fight. They were giving each other the silent treatment. This went on all day, until suddenly, the man realized that the next day, he needed his wife to wake him up at 5am for an early morning business flight. He decided, "Look! I am not going to be the first to break the silence here," so he got a piece of paper, and he wrote, "Please wake me at 5am." He left it where he knew for sure his wife would find it. The next morning, the guy wakes up, and it's 10am. He has missed his flight, he's lost the business account, and he is furious. He's about to go chew his wife out for not waking him up - when he notices a piece of paper pinned to the bed beside him. The paper said, "It is 5am . Wake up." Silence, can be a struggle!

There is one area where I think silence is a struggle for most of us, and that is when it comes to speaking about Jesus - telling people about our faith. I think most of us here today struggle with sharing our faith. By most of us, I mean everybody but Jim Higgins. If you've ever gone to lunch with Higgins, it's incredible. He's telling everyone: "Didn't Jesus give us a beautiful day today? Here, can I open the door for you in the name of Jesus? Let me leave you a tip in the name of Jesus." Talking about Jesus is not a problem for Higgins! So Jim, you can feel good about yourself today. But for the rest of us, it can be so threatening to talk to other people about Jesus. We just struggle with silence.

Let me just ask: Why is that? Why is it so hard to speak to people about Jesus? They might ask a question we don't have an answer to. We don't want to irritate people. Maybe we don't feel like we're a good enough Christian. Maybe we've been told not to. When I was serving here at River Bend on Tuesday, I almost said something to someone about Jesus, and then I remembered "I'm not sure I'm supposed to do that!" There are lots of reasons we might choose to stay silent.

But here's the thing: We need to talk about our faith. People need the hope of Jesus. We need to be sharing and inviting people to come to Jesus. It's our most basic job as disciples. It's why Missions is one our five core values, and it's super important as we move toward the launch of our church. So - we need to speak to others - about our faith. But can we all just agree that could use more boldness in doing that?

Well, today we are continuing in our study of Acts 1-7 called "Launch." Today we are going to look at a passage where Peter and John speak boldly about their faith. Let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to Acts 4. Today we are going to look at the continuation of the story we started last week where Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple. Today, as we look at part 2 of that story, we are going to see Peter and John run into trouble with the religious authorities and boldly share their faith. As we look at this passage today, we'll do a couple of things:

* We'll quickly walk through the passage so that we understand it.

* We'll make three simple observations about Peter and John - and their bold sharing - that I hope will encourage us.

That's really my goal for us this morning. Just that more than anything else we will be encouraged to share our faith. That we will ask the Holy Spirit to show us opportunities and to give us boldness to pursue those opportunities. Let's just walk through the story together.

The Story

The story starts where we left off last week. If you remember, Peter and John had gone to the temple and had healed a lame man that was begging by the temple gates. The Holy Spirit had drawn their attention to him and given them the power to heal him. He had stood, and walked, and jumped around in the Temple. Now that caused quite a stir. Hundreds of people were gathering around to see what had happened. So Peter decided the best thing he could do was preach. He told everyone that the man had been healed in the name of Jesus - and that if they would turn from their sins and believe in Jesus - they would be saved from God's judgment.

That's where the story starts today. Peter is right in the middle of his impromptu sermon when something ominous happens. Look at Acts 4:1-4:

As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. - Acts 4:1-4

Luke tells us that while Peter was preaching three groups of people came up:

- * The priests or actually chief priests
- * The Sadducees - these religious leaders that didn't believe in the resurrection and had helped crucify Jesus
- * The Captain - or Police Chief - of the Temple

These were the people who basically had control over what happened on the Temple grounds. They had heard that Peter was teaching about Jesus and the Resurrection, and they were not happy. They arrested Peter and John - and because it was getting to be evening - and because it was illegal to have a trial by night - they put them in jail until morning. The hearing happened on the next day. Look at verses 5-7:

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" - Acts 4:5-7

This is serious business. Dead serious. Not only are these the very guys that got Jesus crucified, but because the incident and the teaching occurred at the Temple - they could potentially execute Peter and John directly. This was the Sanhedrin - the ruling council - and because this happened at temple, they didn't even have to go through the Romans like they did with Jesus.

So Peter and John were in a serious pickle. The Sanhedrin asked them by what "name or power" they healed the man - trying to accuse them of performing sorcery in the Temple grounds. So this is life-threatening. What would the disciples say? What would you say? "I've never seen this guy

before. He was begging one minute, and then he just started walking around!" That's what the old Peter would say! Look at verses 8-12:

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead - by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." - Acts 4:8-12

Wow! That's a different Peter! The Holy Spirit fills him and not only does he acknowledge that the man was healed by Jesus, but he says "Let's be crystal clear about which Jesus this is - That's 'YOU-REJECTED-AND-KILLED-HIM-BUT-GOD-RAISED-HIM-FROM-THE-DEAD Jesus' - not some other Jesus. And then he says "By the way, he is the only means by which you can be saved from God's coming Judgment." Now that's what I call bold! We wonder how on earth the Sanhedrin will respond. Will they kill him?

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." - Acts 4:13-17

Because the man they had healed is right there - and because there are 5,000 Christians waiting to see what the outcome of this trial will be - and because killing Jesus apparently didn't solve their problem - because these guys had been with the resurrected Christ - they decide to let them go with a warning. They are going to call them in, and then tell them to stop speaking in "that name." Notice they can't even bring themselves to say the word "Jesus." So they call them in to straighten them out with a warning. Look at verses 18-22:

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old. - Acts 4:18-22

Wow! That is courageous. That's the story of Peter and John boldly speaking about Jesus. Why is Luke sharing this story with us? What are we supposed to learn from it? There are three things that really stand out to me, and the first is:

The Source of Peter's Boldness

Isn't Peter's boldness amazing in this passage? And it's so much more amazing when we know Peter's back-story. This is Peter! Think about where's he's been. This is the guy who just 50 days ago denied Jesus. If you remember the story, Peter wasn't even the one on trial. This was Jesus' trial. Peter wasn't even in danger. It was before Jesus was beaten and crucified, so things hadn't gotten rough yet. Peter didn't do it to get away from the Sanhedrin. He did it to get away from a little slave girl. That's where Peter's been.

Now think about where he's at now. Here he is before the same council that condemned Jesus to death. Luke tells us that Peter and John are "in the midst." The Sanhedrin would sit in a semi-circle around you while you stood in the center. This isn't some hidden, night-time trial that they have to be sneaky about. This time it's broad daylight, and they have full authority to sentence Peter and John. Now, knowing all that - you would think that Peter would wilt under the pressure. But what does he do? He claims Jesus boldly. He answers their questions more directly than Jesus did. The more they pressure Peter and John, the more insistent they become.

Now can I ask you a question: Where do you get that kind of boldness?

I went to the website for VOM - that's a ministry that serves persecuted Christians around the world - I looked there to read about boldness in persecution. I saw story after story of YOUR brothers and sisters in Christ - in Sudan - in Pakistan - in India - in Morocco - in Myanmar - in Iran - in Laos - in China - story after story where they have been harassed - and mistreated - and imprisoned - and beaten - and murdered - by people who like the Sanhedrin just want them to stop speaking - stop sharing - stop living in the name of Jesus - but they won't. Where do you get that kind of boldness?

I know a man in Zimbabwe, whose wife was beaten to death and he nearly so, by thieves. The whole time they were beating them, he preached the gospel to them - telling them that they didn't have to live that way because God loved them and sent his Son to die for them.

Where do you get that kind of boldness? The same place the disciples got it. The same place that we get the boldness to tell our neighbors and co-workers and family members about Jesus - even when it's not popular to do so. It comes from the same source, and the text identifies two things:

1. Experience

The disciples had personally experienced - they had seen with their eyes - they had felt in their heart - the difference that Jesus makes. The difference for people like this man who had been healed. The difference for people like Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus - prostitutes and sinners - that had been forgiven and changed by Jesus. The difference for themselves - they had experienced personal transformation through Christ. Nothing can take that away! That's why Peter says to the Sanhedrin: "Look, you decide whether you are going to punish us or not. But as for us,

we can't do anything else but speak about what we have seen and heard. We have to speak about Jesus." Their experience gave them boldness.

I have to ask you something this morning: Have you experienced Christ? I don't just mean have you seen a miraculous healing. I mean have you experienced him - in your heart - in your life? Do you have a story of experience with Jesus? Many of you do. That's why we do "I believe in Jesus because - " every week. You have a story.

Let's join the Apostles! Let's break the silence! Let's say "Look - I get that it's not popular - I get that it's not always welcome - I get that there's a time to speak and not to speak - But I have a story." "And if you want to ask me what gives meaning to my life - if you ask me what caused the good things in my family - if you want to ask where my joy comes from - or how I find love, and peace, and forgiveness for my sins - I cannot not speak about Jesus."

Have you experienced Christ? If you haven't, be concerned - take care for your soul - talk to me - ask Christ to enter your life and change you. Take care of it today! If you have, speak up! You have a story. You have experience. That's the first source of their boldness. The second is:

2. The Holy Spirit

Luke makes this very plain in the passage. In verse 8, when Peter begins his courageous address of the Sanhedrin - Luke starts it by saying "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said - " and he gives us Peter's address.

Peter's holy - godly - silence-breaking boldness - came from the Holy Spirit. So let me ask you another question. This is the question that Obbie Clemmons asked us just a few weeks ago when she told us why she believes in Jesus: Have you asked the Holy Spirit to become operative in your life? Have come to the Spirit - who is a person, not a force - and said "Would you please be operative in my life? I want to hand the keys to you." Have you tried asking the Holy Spirit - week to week - day to day - minute to minute - to guide you?

I don't know what that's like for other people, but for me it was a little strange at first. I would just go through my day like normal on the outside. But on the inside, I was asking the Holy Spirit: What do you want me to see? Who do you want me to talk to? What do you want me to do? Then I would see someone - and feel a little nudge - and I would be like "Is that you Holy Spirit - or is that the enchiladas I ate for lunch?" Then, I would take a little step of faith and engage the person: I found that I was almost always glad that I did. For me - that's what it's like most of the time.

Now, I believe there are big moments - of crisis - or pain - or ministry - where the Holy Spirit fills you and moves very powerfully. But most of the time, it's just learning to listen for his voice. He moves us to act if we will listen for him. So the source of their boldness was their experience of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Conviction of Peter's Message

Peter makes a very bold, very demanding statement in verse 12. Look at how he closes his address to the Sanhedrin: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

"Salvation is found in no one else." I am really struck by Peter's words, because Peter - who after the resurrection has become so focused - so crystal clear in his theology - is now making a theological statement. What he's saying is this: When it comes to salvation - Jesus isn't just the real deal - He's the only deal. Wow! He's saying that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Notice who he's saying that to: These are the religious leaders - the Old Testament scholars - the Chief Priests - of Israel. These guys aren't atheists. They aren't animists. They aren't idol worshippers. They worship the God of the Bible, religiously (sacrifice, prayers). If anyone could make it without Jesus, these guys would be the ones! Peter is telling them that they won't find salvation outside of Him. Peter is saying that there's one way.

That can sound so harsh to our modern ears. It can sound narrow. Honestly, in our post-modern, multi-cultural society we value different viewpoints. Rigidity and exclusion seem very suspicious to us. In many instances, rightly so. So, Peter's stance here is unpopular.

But think about it with me. If the gospel is really true, then Jesus really is the only logical means of salvation. If there really is such a thing as sin - if it really stands between us and God - if there really is a judgment coming - then we need forgiveness. It makes sense that that forgiveness cannot be obtained through a religious ceremony. That doesn't undo the past. It makes sense that that forgiveness cannot be obtained through morality or good behavior. That can't undo the past. It can't be obtained by God simply pretending that our sin doesn't exist - then heaven would be populated with unchanged, sinful people - and it would be just like earth!

OK - so if that's true - and it's true that God sent his Son to die in our place and pay for our sins - and give us his sinless transforming resurrection life - if that's the way things work - then what Peter is saying is only logical. There really is salvation in no one else. There really is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." If the gospel is true, Jesus really is the only way.

I've just finished reading an excellent book called "Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus." It's written by an American man, whose parents immigrated from Pakistan and were very devout Muslims and so was he for 20 years. I highly recommend this book to you. It will raise your understanding and your compassion for your Muslim neighbors. He talks a lot about the good side of Islamic culture - the strength of their families - their generosity - why for most Muslims in the west Islam really is NOT a religion of violence. I highly recommend it.

The reason I mention it is that the author spent several years investigating Christianity and Islam. I've heard many people say that Christians and Muslims basically worship the same God. It was clear to the writer from the beginning that they aren't the same God at all. That these were two

different Gods - two different paths that go in very different ways - and that to choose one is to reject the other. It was clear to him that if Jesus was the way. He was the only way.

My point is that while Peter's words are not popular today they are logical. Let me say one more thing: This truth - that there is no other name - is the only thing that makes sense of the bold witness of Peter and John. Listen - if morality is enough - if being a theist is enough - if the Old Testament is enough - why be bold? Why risk imprisonment or death? Why inconvenience yourself or anybody else? If they're OK without the gospel, why bother them? Why be bold?

There's no reason. In fact, a church that doesn't believe in the lostness of people will never truly sacrifice for the gospel. It just doesn't make sense trying to convince people to trust in Jesus when they are fine on their own. Would be like coming up to a building that's on fire and trying to talk someone into jumping from a 3rd story window to your little tarp when there's a perfectly good fire escape right outside the window. Why would they jump? Why would you try to talk them into it? It doesn't make sense. Neither your sacrifice nor theirs would make any sense.

So if Jesus isn't the only way - why sacrifice? But if the gospel is true - if Peter's words are right and Jesus is the only way - then Peter and John's behavior makes perfect sense. And boldness - and sacrifice - is required of us. That's why Missions is one of our values. That's why we give ¼ of our budget to get the gospel out around the world. That's why we should be bold - to invite our friends to Perry Creek - and to talk about Jesus with them.

The source of Peter's boldness was Experience and the Holy Spirit. The conviction of Peter's message was logical. Now the last thing I notice is just this:

The Result of Peter's Risk

We really can't quit without noticing the result of Peter's boldness. There are two results:

First, God protects Peter and John. Despite the real danger they were in - despite the council they stood before - despite what the Sanhedrin had done to Jesus - the Apostles escape without a scratch. So God protects them, and God grows the church. Did you see that? The church went from 3,000 in chapter 2 to 5,000 in chapter 4. God protects his people and grows his church.

When it comes to being bold for Jesus, it's not always God's plan to protect his servants. We'll see that in a few chapters so much of the time it is. Much of the time God protects his people. You've heard my story of how God protected me in Zimbabwe. God also protected Tim Brannagan, who spoke two weeks ago. He had a situation in Liberia - In a civil war - where he was hidden in a room and he could hear people being executed just outside the door. But God protected him.

We used to have a saying in Zimbabwe: Safety is not found in the absence of danger. It's found in the presence of God. God often protects his people. In the end, the risk - the boldness - even the suffering that God may allow - is used to grow the gospel. So what are we worried about? Really, a raised eyebrow? No answers - anger - not good enough - told not to. Let's break the silence. Let's be bold for the gospel. Let's listen to the Holy Spirit. Let's speak about what we've seen and heard. Let's share Jesus with those around us.