

## **The Boldness of the Church**

**Acts 4:13-31**

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Good morning. It is a blessing to see you all today and to have the opportunity to preach God's Word to you. Please turn in your Bibles to Acts 4:13-31. Let me give you some context for our passage before we read it. Jesus has already been crucified, buried, and resurrected from the dead.

Before ascending into heaven, he met with his disciples and gave them their marching orders to be his witnesses to the world. After his ascension, Jesus delivered his promised Holy Spirit as a deposit and seal of his presence and power on those who trust in him as Savior.

Then, His Spirit descended and indwelt the believers with miraculous power. It is at this point that Peter stands before a confused and perplexed crowd and preaches the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ to them. He assured them that God has made Jesus Christ, the one they crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

Three thousand people repented that day and changed their minds about who Jesus actually is, and they believed in him as Savior for the forgiveness of sins. The church exploded in growth in one day and continued to grow thereafter. One of the reasons for the growth is Holy Spirit-enabled miracles the Apostles performed.

In Acts 3, the first recorded miracle is performed by Peter and John. As they were going into the temple to worship one day, they encountered a lame man, who had been lame from birth. Every day he would sit outside the temple and beg for money. But, on this day, Peter was able to give him something better. He said to the man, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!"

The man then stood to his feet, began walking and jumping, and went into the temple praising God with the Apostles. This caused a large commotion and the people were astonished at what they saw. Once again, Peter began to preach to them. He told them:

"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And, it is by faith in the name of Jesus, that this man who you see and know was made strong." You see, it was Jesus' name and faith in that name by which this man was completely healed.

Now, the religious leaders, called the Sadducees, heard Peter's proclamation of the resurrection of Christ and were disturbed because they didn't believe in, or teach, the resurrection of the dead. So, they put Peter and John in jail until they could figure out what to do with them. In the meantime, the Sadducees gathered together a group of leaders called the Sanhedrin to figure what to do with them.

The Sanhedrin was the highest ruling body of the Jews. It was made up of seventy leaders plus the high priest, who served as the president. Acts 4:5 shows us that this ruling council of seventy was made up of three main groups: the rulers who were the chief priests of the temple; the elders or family heads of the nation; and the Scribes who were the experts in the law.

Much like our government today, the Sanhedrin was made up of two political parties. The first was the Pharisees which consisted mostly of Scribes or experts in the law. The second was the Sadducees which were of noble class. They possessed much of the wealth, owned most of the land, and had most of the power.

So, it is unsurprising that we see the Sadducees angry and nervous about the message being preached that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. In addition to this point, Peter said in Acts 4:12 that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which man must be saved.

So, they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead and now they are hearing of someone so powerful that salvation is only found in him. If this were true, they feared they would lose all their power. So, here stand Peter and John, on trial before seventy of the most powerful people in their nation and Peter has given them more truth than they can handle about Jesus. Here is where we pick up today in Acts 4:13-31.

**13 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.**

**14 But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.**

**15 So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. 16 "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.**

**17 But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”**

**18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.**

**19 But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! 20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”**

**21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.**

**23 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.**

Bold. Did you catch that word “boldly.” Every Christian has a desire to be bold for Christ. I don’t think that anyone here would honestly say that they have a desire to be a weak Christian.

We don’t aspire to be unprepared to give a reason for the hope we have. We don’t desire to do the bare minimum in showing love. We don’t seek to cower in fear when we have an opportunity to stand for Christ. Instead, we want to be bold.

These Christians spoke the word of God boldly. This is the reason why I entitled the message today, “The Boldness of the Church.” Now, the word boldness has a few meanings.

First, it means to stand out. When you are typing on the computer and you highlight a specific text and press Control + B, you instantly make that text stand out from the rest so that you can more strongly emphasize what you are trying to say.

Another definition of boldness is the conviction and expression of undeniable truths. It is when you believe a truth so strongly at your core that you cannot help but express it in words, attitude, and action. It is a godly sort of stubbornness that does not apologize for, nor falter in expressing the Gospel of Jesus.

When you have this kind of conviction and express the truth of Jesus Christ, you will stand out. It will be recognizable. You will look different from the rest of the world. The church today is in desperate need of this kind of boldness to grip the hearts of its members so that the world will see God’s heart for humanity. But, what is our source of boldness:

## **What is Our Source of Boldness?**

### **1. Fellowship with Christ**

Your boldness for Christ is directly related to the strength of your fellowship with Christ - proximity to him and your closeness with him. Verse 13 says,

**“They took note that these men had been with Jesus.”**

Perhaps they thought, “Oh, the reason these men can talk with such authority on these things is because they sat under the teaching of Jesus. While that is certainly the case, it goes much deeper than that. Jesus gave them so much more than his teaching. He gave them a relationship with God as Father, and fellowship with God as Friend.

Surely, the Sanhedrin didn't understand. It wasn't just that these men had been with Jesus at some point in the past, but Jesus was with them at that moment by means of his Spirit. Jesus had told them that this kind of fellowship would be possible on the night before he was crucified.

John wrote about this in his Gospel. In John 15:4-5, Jesus told John and Peter:

**John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.**

**John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (ESV)**

Do you want to bear fruit? You want boldness for Christ? Abide in Jesus. Have fellowship with Christ. Hang out with Jesus. This promise is for every believer, not just a select or "special" few. The text says the Jewish leaders were amazed when they

**"Realized they were unschooled, ordinary men"**

So many of us think that we must first have this vast amount of knowledge about Jesus before we can be bold for him. "If I only knew more, then I could share more. It would be better if I encouraged them to go see someone else who could explain it better." That's a lie.

The apostles were ordinary men, not scholars, and this should encourage us. It's not how much we "know **about** Jesus", it is about how much we "know Jesus." The disciples didn't just learn information about Jesus second hand. They had been with Jesus and they continued to abide in him, and it is from their fellowship with Christ that their knowledge about him was formed.

In addition to this, you have the man who was healed standing next to them, and Peter and John had the truth to proclaim why this man was healed. It was Jesus! He was healed in Jesus' name. So even though the Sanhedrin didn't believe the apostles' preaching, they looked at the living testimony of the healed man, and the word of God says,

**"There was nothing they could say."**

People can deny theology alone, but they will have nothing to say when you boldly speak theology as a transformed man or woman of God. You see, your relationship with

God and your continued closeness in fellowship with him will transform you. You will bear much fruit and it will be obvious. The world will think, “I don’t like what they are saying, but I can tell that person has been with Jesus.”

### **What is Our Source of Boldness?**

- 1. Fellowship with Christ**
- 2. Obedience in Opposition**

When the Sanhedrin realized there was nothing they could say, they sent them out and conferred together to figure out what they should do. Everyone knew about the miracle and there was no evidence they could offer to deny it or provide an alternative theory. So, they resorted to a lighter form of persecution:

**“They commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”**

All around the world, there are countries where the very proclamation of the Gospel results in a Christian’s imprisonment, torture, or death. Thankfully, we live in a country where we don’t experience this level of persecution...yet! Instead, the American church experiences a similar persecution these Jewish leaders eventually imposed here on Peter and John: intimidation, suppression and censorship.

As a Christian in America, we face a weight of intimidation and pressure to remain silent in our faith. In our culture, any religion other than Christianity seems to be celebrated and encouraged. Furthermore, any movements or fads that celebrate ideologies and behaviors that contribute to the moral degradation of our society are championed.

It is regularly considered hate speech for a Christian say that these paths lead to destruction. To preach that a relationship with God, forgiveness of sin, and the true abundant life that is possible only through Jesus Christ is now considered bigotry and intolerance. As a result, the message of the gospel is regularly censored on the internet, social media, the news, and television.

Intimidation tactics are also used in various ways in our society. There is a consistent pressure to keep silent about our faith at our workplaces, schools, the marketplace, and political venues.

This trickles down even to daily interactions. I can’t tell you how many times I have heard someone say, “there are two things you just don’t talk about: religion and politics.” It seems like that has become an unspoken law in society - a line that should not be crossed.

However, fellow Christian, this resistance should not cause you to shrink back in fear. Instead, you should evermore be drawn to obedience when the Lord's message is opposed. Jesus said in John 15:18-19

**John 15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.**

**20 Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.**

**John 15:21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.**

Opposition to Christianity is so sad, because it is actually opposition to good being done in the world. The ministry of Jesus has always been to heal, help, and save. That is his desire for the world and we believe it to be true because he has healed, helped, and saved us.

The only hope these apostles had within them came from their certainty in who they followed and what he had done for them. A tribunal of seventy men stood no chance at being victorious against them because victory had already been accomplished in their hearts. You cannot fully suppress what Christ has fully set free.

So when the world hates you because of your obedience to the gospel message, your boldness will intensify. The gospel truth that has caused transformation in the depths of your soul will burst forth from your lips. As you continue to be obedient to the gospel message, you will join the unwavering cry of the Apostles in saying:

**"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you or to him? As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."**

**What is Our Source of Boldness?**

- 1. Fellowship with Christ**
- 2. Obedience in Opposition**
- 3. Prayer in Community**

After further threats, they let Peter and John go. The apostles went back to their fellow believers, the church, and reported everything the Sanhedrin said to them. Listen to how the church responded...

**Acts 4:24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.**

Boldness was experienced by the church voicing prayer together. Prayer was their method to request boldness and they did in a way that we would be good for us to emulate as a church:<sup>1</sup>

### **The Church's Method of Prayer**

#### **1. In The Right Spirit (v. 24)**

In verse 24, they prayed in the right spirit. This was not a self-centered prayer, focused only on an individual's needs. This was a symphony of prayer from people united in mind and spirit. They started by praising God for his sovereignty over creation and humanity.

### **The Church's Method of Prayer**

#### **1. In The Right Spirit (v. 24)**

#### **2. On the Right Basis (vv. 25-26)**

In verses 25-26, they prayed on the right basis. Their prayers were solidly based on the Word of God. They prayed Scripture together (Psalm 2:1-2).

### **The Church's Method of Prayer**

#### **1. In The Right Spirit (v. 24)**

#### **2. On the Right Basis (vv. 25-26)**

#### **3. For the Right Reason (vv. 27-30)**

In verses 27-30, they didn't pray a vindictive prayer requesting God to change their circumstances. You would think that they would have asked for deliverance from persecution. Instead they prayed for courage to endure it and minister through it.

They asked for power to make the most of their circumstances and convince their enemies of the Gospel. They prayed for more healing, more signs, more wonders

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<sup>1</sup>Content adapted from Brian L. Harbor, *Living Expectantly* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 41-42.



through the name of Jesus. They did not pray for God to make things easier on them, but instead they prayed for stronger character to meet those circumstances.

Now, some of you have an unconscious block about praying aloud. You may fear what others think. You may fear imperfection in praying. Maybe you fear that you would cry in front of other people.

Some of you may feel too much pressure to be eloquent with your words and impress everyone with rich content. Some may feel like God is too far away because you struggle with sin and don't believe he wants to talk to you.

Whatever the excuse, the Bible teaches us the necessity of praying alone AND praying together as believers. Why?

Because when we pray together we share each other's burdens. Shared burdens become lighter burdens. Jesus knows that the problems of life press in upon us when we are alone. It is often in loneliness that our wounds are accentuated. Sometimes our minds refuse to accept reality. We need each other so we don't become weary.

When we pray together we grow closer to other believers and begin to trust them. We learn to pray more honestly about our real problems, not just surface level stuff. We hear people's hearts for God and their specific needs.

When we pray together the Spirit of God has our attention. When we agree in all that we are asking, it leaves no room for wavering, double-mindedness or doubt. When we pray together we become bold and honest, and ask for things we never intended asking for at all.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is Our Source of Boldness?**

- 1. Fellowship with God**
- 2. Obedience in Opposition**
- 3. Prayer in Community**
- 4. Power from the Spirit**

After the church prays, we read this is verse 31:

**31...the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.**

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<sup>2</sup>The reasons we pray together were adapted from Rosalind Rinker, *Prayer: Conversing with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1959), 42-43.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul tells the church to be filled with the Spirit. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? The way the word “filled” is used in the Greek has the sense of “keeping on being filled.”

You see, we are baptized and sealed by the Spirit when we first believe in Jesus and enter a relationship with God. This is a one-time operation that makes us “full of the Spirit.” Imagine a believer as an empty jar that is filled to the top with water.

Now, this believer who is full of the Spirit, can still be filled with the Spirit. Imagine that same full jar of water with more water now being added into it. What happens? It overflows! Being filled with the Holy Spirit is the overflow of the Spirit in the life of a believer who is already full of the Spirit.

Perhaps the overflow had ceased for these New Testament believers as they waited in fear for Peter and John to return from prison and trial. Perhaps God intended this filling to prevent a development or continual state of fear in these young believers.

Whatever the case, they prayed together, and God answered! And, the Spirit of God was poured upon the believers and overflowed in boldness to speak the Word of God.

Let the same be true of us. May we come to the source of boldness daily. May we draw near to God in fellowship, be obedient to his Word when faced with opposition, pray in community, and receive his power from the Spirit. He has proven faithful to give it in excess!

Let’s stand together as we respond to this message. I want us to do something a little different. I think we should follow the example that was set for us by the early church two thousand years ago. They prayed together for boldness, and I think it would be fitting for us to do the same.

I am going to put a corporate prayer up on the screen. This is a prayer I pieced together from Acts 3 and 4. I want us to pray this prayer out loud together as a church family. Before we pray out loud, I want you to take a few moments to read the prayer first and prepare your heart.

Now, if you haven’t trusted in Christ as your Savior, and you believe the words you read silently, then you could receive Christ as your Savior when we pray out loud together.

**Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You hold all things together. God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you have glorified your servant Jesus.**

**We believe that he was crucified and died for our sins, but that you raised him from the dead. We believe salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.**

**Thank you for saving us when we called upon your name. Lord, we gratefully stand before you healed, restored, and full of the Spirit. We cannot help but speak our testimony about what we have seen and heard even when we face opposition.**

**Now, Lord, fill us with your Spirit, and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand and heal our land through the name of your holy servant Jesus. Amen.**

Usually we close our eyes as we pray to block out distractions. Just focus on what we are saying as you read and pray the words. Follow the cadence of my voice as we pray out loud together.