

# Gospel Boldness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, if you have your Bibles, and if you're using a church Bible, you'll find Acts chapter 4! there on page 1095. And we're going to pick up the theme of this chapter, just to remind you, if you would find it helpful to have the translation into your own language, there's the code up on the screen. This morning we're thinking about the theme of our chapter, which is gospel boldness. I guess we know that boldness is a quality that can be, and often is, infectious. Courage is contagious.

You spend time with a person who is persuaded that they're going to change the world, and you can be part of that. If you spend time with someone who's got big plans for their group, for their community, for their church, and they take leadership and ownership, often we can find ourselves swept up in that. If you're here today, and you are a bold and courageous person, if you're the kind of Christian that's eager to share your faith, or if you have ideas that you really believe in, you will find that you will become a person of influence, because courage and boldness are infectious. Now, I want to say straight out, I'm 100% not that kind of person.

Listen, I'm the timid guy. On my holiday, I read a wonderful, I should have read it years ago, William Carey in 1792 wrote a pamphlet about the responsibility of the church for global mission, and Carey was one of those bold, courageous Christians. You know, he basically said in that document, since Jesus is alive, since he's raised from the dead, there is no barrier to the spread of the gospel. Nothing is going to halt God's work of building his kingdom. Therefore, Christians have every reason to go to the nations. And he would say, there are places with cannibals, people that eat other people. Don't let that stop you. You don't know that other language? That's no problem. God can help you with that. He basically had that kind of pattern that dealt with every excuse, and it led to a massive missionary movement, thousands of people going across the globe.

His boldness sparked a great missionary movement. And actually, even as I was reading it at the distance of however many 250 or so years, it got me fired up as well for the glory of God in his world, because boldness, even when we just read it, is infectious. And that's what takes us to Acts chapter four, because Acts chapter four is all about gospel boldness that we see from the apostles in the early church. So we're going to ask ourselves three questions related to gospel boldness. Very simple.

[ 2 : 49 ] First of all, how do we see it in our chapter? How do we explain it from our chapter? And then how can we get it in our day? Because when we read Acts chapter four as a church, what are we being given?

We are being given a compelling vision of what Jesus wants us to be, of what by his spirit we can be, regular Christians, timid Christians, but with an amazing message, an amazing savior, and with courage and power to both share it and to live it. So let's get into our text. First of all, first question, how do we see it? How do we see this boldness? Just to remind folks who haven't been around, perhaps in chapter three, here's what's happened. Peter has healed a man who was lame from birth, so for 40 years couldn't walk. Now he can. He's been healed by the powerful name of Jesus, and that has drawn an amazed crowd around the temple on that day, and it led Peter to preach powerfully in Jesus' name, that faith in Jesus is what brings healing and brings salvation. And then comes chapter four. What happens next? Two things, I think, happen. We find the religious leaders, they are, verse two, greatly disturbed because of this teaching, especially about the resurrection. The temple police are then sent to arrest Peter and John, so they throw them in jail overnight. But at the same time, many who heard the message believed, verse four, the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000.

So now the church sits at about 5,000 men, not including women, not including children. Verse five to seven, after a night in the cells, Peter and John are then brought out, and they're asked a

question. And this is a total gimme for Peter. Listen to the question.

By what power or what name did you do this? Now, for Peter, this is a dream question.

Because as Jesus promised to his followers, when you are confronted by opponents, trust that the Holy Spirit will give you words to speak. And so as he trusts, he gets his message. So the first thing that we see in terms of boldness is we see bold preaching. It's here in verses eight to 12. So he begins with that kind of, that irony. Listen, are you really arresting us and getting us into trouble for healing a man? Remember how often Jesus got in trouble for doing good works. And so he's calling into a question that kind of logic. But then he returns to a theme we've seen a number of times.

[ 5 : 36 ] That comparison, your verdict versus God's verdict on Jesus. Look at verse 10. Know this, you and all the people of Israel, it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified.

Okay, so he's bringing to their attention, here was your verdict, you rejected Jesus and you killed him. But what's God's verdict? God raised him from the dead. God gave his son honor and glory. Then he goes on to quote from Psalm 118. Jesus is the stone you builders rejected. So he's got this picture of the religious leaders being like a bunch of builders who look at a particular stone and say, well, that's of no value. They looked at Jesus and said, Jesus is of no value. He's not worthy of God's kingdom. He's not needed as a savior. We're perfectly fine without him. But what was God's verdict?

Jesus is the one who has become the cornerstone. He is the key stone in God's building project. He is the foundation upon which the church and the mission of God is built. And following that, second theme of the preaching is that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. Your salvation does not come in your law keeping. Your salvation will not come in trusting in a Caesar or the gods of Rome. The only way to be saved, the only way to be right with God is believing in God's risen son, Jesus. He is the one way to have peace with God. Peter is very bold when he preaches, especially when we take into account the fact that

Luke emphasizes that Sadducees make up a lot of this hostile crowd. And the Sadducees, they don't believe in any resurrection. Not in the middle of time, not at the end of time. There's no resurrection ever. But what does Peter say? He says, God is pleased to save people through the risen Lord Jesus.

[ 8 : 11 ] That's the only way to be saved, that's the only way to be saved, is to accept the reality of Jesus raised from the dead and to trust in him. And a pattern is being set from the early church until today, that Christianity challenges wrong cultural ideas about Jesus. The Jews, the religious leaders, they were wrong because they thought Jesus was a nobody guilty of blasphemy.

But think very soon, Christianity is going to jump into the Roman Empire. And to the Roman Empire, the cross of Jesus was the ultimate scandal. The way you dealt with the lowest of the low and the worst of the worst was by nailing them to a cross. And crucifixion was used by the Roman Empire as a billboard to say, we have power. We have power to humiliate and to punish. So get in line and follow Caesar. But in God's hands, what happens to the cross of Christ? Humiliation turns to glory. Death becomes life. The suffering servant proclaimed King of Kings. And in the gospel, where do we go to find our demonstration of God's love?

We now go to the cross. Here is love. God's sending his own son to die in our place for our sins. So Christianity has always challenged wrong ideas about Jesus.

Same is true in our day. You know, the idea that Jesus is just one of the prophets. Jesus is just one of many options. Jesus is a good man, good teacher perhaps, but not the God man.

Or Jesus is simply of no relevance to my life. Into that context, we boldly and lovingly declare the risen Jesus is Lord. So we see bold preaching. We also see bold persistence. Look at verses 13 to 22.

[ 10 : 36 ] And we discover something. We discover that the authorities have got a problem on their hands. We can see the problem really clearly in verse 16. What are we going to do with these men? They asked.

Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they've performed a notable sign and we cannot deny it. Okay, so there's thousands of eyewitnesses to the fact that a miracle has taken place. Friends and enemies of Jesus, everybody knows a miracle has happened. They can't deny it. They can't challenge the facts. So what are they going to do? Their new plan is threat and intimidation.

To stop this thing, verse 17, from spreading any further, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name. So they call them in and command them not to speak or teach at all.

In the name of Jesus, verse 21, after further threats, they let them go. Here's a group of people who are stubbornly resistant to the claims of Jesus. They've just seen Jesus' power. They raised someone who couldn't walk and now he's running and jumping and praising God. They are still determined to stop the good news message of Jesus from spreading. And again, we need to recognize this is a situation faced by many of our brothers and sisters in Christ today. It's not our story, but it is theirs.

Governments, local authorities, community leaders who act to ban public worship, the owning of a Bible, talking to others about Jesus. So we always need to be praying for courage, for boldness, for perseverance, for them as well as ourselves. But how do Peter and John respond? So picture the scene for a moment. You know, they've spent a night in jail and then they've been dragged out of their cell and they're surrounded now by the most powerful figures in the city, these religious leaders, and they're issuing threats to them. What happens next? Verse 19, Peter and John replied, which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to him. You be the judges.

[ 12 : 59 ] They know what God wants for them. So what the authorities tell them is of no concern in this occasion. We might say the fear of the Lord is greater to the apostles than the fear of men.

And so they are going to carry on. They know who Jesus is. And they know what Jesus has done. So look at verse 20. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we've seen and heard.

Now that Jesus has been raised in victory, now that from heaven he has sent the Spirit, they are beginning to discover this reality that no opposition is going to stop the kingdom building project of the Lord Jesus. There are no barriers that the good news of salvation will not smash through. That the joy of sins being forgiven, of having peace with God, the gift of eternal life, of getting to serve and be a part of his kingdom, that's a joy they can't and they won't hold in.

Like the very best of news that just needs to be shared. And so we get this beautiful picture in Peter and John of hearts that are captured by the love and the goodness of the Lord Jesus.

It was Jesus said, out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. Their hearts are full of Jesus and what he's done for them. And so they can't but speak about him. The reaction of other people, the results of their preaching, that's in God's hands. But for them, they're going to keep talking and keep serving. So we see bold preaching, bold perseverance. And then we see bold praying, verse 23 to 31. And we were looking at this in our community groups on Wednesday, but I love the response of the church. Verse 23, Peter and John are released. They go back to the church.

[ 14 : 57 ] They told all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them and their response, their instinct, let's pray. Let's pray about this. And notice who they pray to. Verse 24, they pray to the sovereign Lord, the Lord who is King, the one who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. The one who is in control. The one who is powerful. And also to the one who planned and prophesied all this. Verse 25 to 28. This is when they quote from Psalm 2. Why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain against God's anointed King? And they see that being worked out and inherited and Pontius Pilate and the religious leaders conspiring against Jesus. Now they're looking at Psalm 2 and they're saying, this has been fulfilled. Because we know that Jesus is God's chosen Savior King. We saw that he was opposed and he was conspired against, but we know that that attempt to halt his mission failed because he's alive. And further, they know this is all part of God's plan of salvation.

Verse 28, they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. It was always established from before the world came into existence that God's suffering servant King, the Lord Jesus, would come. And that he would build his kingdom through humble sacrifice. That he would come to bear our sin and the punishment that sin deserves. He would come to die in our place. So you and I might be forgiven. You and I might find life in Jesus. That you and I, although by nature guilty, we might be declared righteous as a gift of God's grace. And then notice how they pray.

This is a great fill in the blanks moment. How would we fill in this blank? Now, Lord, here's their prayer request. Consider their threats and... How would we fill that in? Consider their threats and stop them, perhaps? Consider their threats and punish them? Maybe. Consider their threats and spare us, protect us?

Likely. But this church, totally focused on God's glory and God's mission. What do they pray? Consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. That's their request.

[ 17 : 46 ] Give us more boldness so that we will keep speaking. Verse 30, God, stretch out your hand, show your power, show your signs and wonders to show the powerful name of Jesus as the only one that saves.

And we see that God loves to answer this prayer, this faith-filled prayer. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly. It's words that sound similar to Pentecost, when God poured out the Spirit the first time. And now He pours out the Spirit so that they might have more of His power and His presence to be able to keep speaking boldly about Jesus. Prayer, mission, boldness. The history of the church shows Spirit-filled prayer is the fuel on which God's mission runs.

Some of us were maybe brought up on the story of the Lewis revivals, two women praying in their croft and revival came. Maybe you've heard about the great prayer movements that birthed the church in Korea. Maybe you've heard of a guy called Count Zinzendorf, a great name and wonderful guy. In the 1600s, he was part of this Moravian movement of Christians, and they organized a 24-7 prayer movement. So, there's a great movement in prayer happening again today, but they organized a 24-7 prayer movement.

They divided the week into, oh no, I've forgotten how many hours are in a week, but you'll figure it out. But anyway, so they divided it into that number of slots and allocated people slots. This is in the 1600s, this is before WhatsApp and email, and they had this 24-7 missionary prayer movement, not just for one day, one week, one month, one year, 110 years. And after that, there was an incredible outburst of global mission. Hundreds of missionaries sent to the furthest reaches of the globe because God loves to answer faith-fueled prayer. So, this is what gospel boldness looks like, where Jesus is being spoken about, where nothing is going to hold us back, where we're praying for God to keep pouring out the Spirit to give us more boldness. Friends, isn't this an amazing vision of what the local church could be and should be? So, how might we see it in Beclu? How might we work towards that in Beclu?

As we pray for the Spirit to direct our encounters and our conversations, as we continue to pray for the power and the boldness and the wisdom to say, Jesus is unique. He's not just a good man. He's not just one option among many, and you really need to know Him for yourself. Perhaps as we have the courage to invite someone to church, or to invite them to the solace meal, and if there's hesitation that we invite them again. Maybe it's as we look to think about adding, have you ever wondered into our conversations? Maybe it looks like taking a risk to move a friendship forward in depth.

[ 21 : 19 ] So that we begin to talk about things that really matter, so we can share Jesus. Maybe it looks like us collectively praying with passion for the glory of Jesus' name.

Committing together as a band of brothers and sisters to boldly serve. But here we get a great picture of what gospel boldness looks like.

The second question, this is way more brief, is how do we explain this kind of boldness? I think this is really important for us to ask. Because like me, you might read William Cady's pamphlet and say, wow. Or you might read Acts chapter 4 and say, wow. But in the next breath, you might say, but that's not for me because I'm not a bold person.

We were joking about it a little bit in community group. And then I was speaking to our mission partner, Manuel. He lived in Scotland for a while, and he has a great way of talking about us Stoic Scots.

Some of us here are Scots. We know what it is to be Stoic. And he said this, he's like, you look at Scottish history, and you see that when there's a fight, when our backs are against the wall, then Scots can become like warriors. Then we get those brave heart moments. But ordinarily, we're kind of backwards, and kind of polite, and kind of apologetic. So here's the question. Maybe for us, if we're Scottish, if we're that kind of temperament, is boldness just for other cultures? Is it just for other types of people who are not like me or not like us? We need to recognize something about Peter and John, that as we encounter them in the gospel, we discover they were not always and not naturally courageous and bold. Just a few weeks earlier, at the point of Jesus' arrest, they had run away.

[ 23 : 18 ] And when Peter was asked by a servant girl and by a small crowd around the phone, weren't you a friend of Jesus? No, I didn't know that man. That's really important, because it helps us to see that the boldness of a Christian, it does not come from ourselves. This isn't about a personality type, and this is not either about willpower. Let me roll my sleeves up in my endeavor to

be more bold.

How do we explain it? The key verse is verse 13. Look with me at verse 13. When they saw the courage, the boldness of Peter and John, and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, they were astonished, and they took notes of what? That these men had been with Jesus. They hadn't been enrolled in some fancy school for rabbis to learn how to argue theology, but they had been enrolled in the school of Christ. They were witnesses of his ministry, and his miracles, and his life. They saw him die. They met him risen from the dead, and they know that Jesus is still with them by his Spirit. How can they powerfully defend their faith against religious leaders that just a few weeks ago they'd run in terror from?

Because they know Jesus is alive, and he is God's anointed King and Savior. They have seen, and they have experienced, and they are still experiencing the power, the love, and the goodness of Jesus. Now, as we keep seeing in the book of Acts, they're reading their Bibles, and they're listening to God's Word, and they're encountering Jesus again, and again, and again, like here in Psalm 118, or here in Psalm 2. And when they pray, now the powerful name of Jesus, seeking more of his Spirit.

We see that there in verse 30. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. For you and I, to have this kind of boldness, we need to be those who spend time with Jesus. We need to be awakened to the gospel again and again. We need to find our joy, our freedom, our hope, our love, our life in knowing and being known by Jesus.

To remember the gospel, to consider the cost of our salvation. The Father sending the Son he loves, the Son being rejected, crucified. We need to consider the reason for the cross.

[ 26 : 32 ] God's justice being satisfied, God's love being displayed, my sin being dealt with, my rescue secured. And we need to consider Jesus now. No longer dead, but raised and glorified, seated in honor at the Father's right hand, united to his people, and still building his church as he sends the Spirit. It's knowing Jesus and his gospel that creates boldness. That's the only explanation.

Back to William Carey. He went to India as a missionary. He was there for decades. He wrote this. He said, when I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong, but amongst so many obstacles, it would die unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and his word is true. God's cause will triumph.

And then after years waiting for his first convert to Christ, he wrote this. He was only one. He was convinced that God and his word and the gospel were true and powerful.

Are we convinced that God's promises are totally true? Are we convinced that Jesus lives in our hearts right now and he pours out the Spirit to help us in our mission? Are we persuaded that God is Lord over all and he deserves all glory and worship in all people, in all places? Are we persuaded that God has raised Jesus, that he has defeated Satan and sin and death? He is establishing his kingdom.

Do we have faith that God's grace has the power to change a heart and a family and a city and a nation? Because it's as we believe gospel truths and Jesus, who is the heart of the gospel, that we will find gospel boldness. There's a third question, and it's where it gets really personal.

[ 29 : 02 ] How can we get this kind of boldness? So we leave the church in Acts 4. They've prayed for boldness. The Spirit has come, and we see them boldly speaking and living for Jesus. There's this continuing.

They're praying for power. They're going out on mission in the power of the Spirit. And it's good for us to ask, how can our encounter with their gospel boldness be infectious in our day? So it's not just then and there, but it's here and now. How can this be the pattern? How can this be the power for our mission? Whether we're thinking about Newington on the south side, whether we're thinking about Edinburgh as a whole, or whether we're thinking about the communities where we have our relationships, the places where we work and study? What have we seen in Acts chapter 4?

Let me suggest this by way of a summary, and then we'll think of some points. The boldness that we see is the gift of the risen Lord Jesus through His Spirit's transforming power in response to His people's prayers. So that gives us some follow-up. First, let's pray together in Jesus' name for boldness.

We're going to be adding new times of prayer for our church as of next week, because we need it. To seek help from the Holy Spirit for those times when our testimony is met by apathy or opposition.

To seek the help of the Holy Spirit so that together we'd have courage and wisdom to know how to have meaningful conversations. To pray for one another, to have boldness, to live out our faith before others in whatever context we find ourselves in.

[ 31 : 00 ] So let's be praying. Let's spend time listening to Jesus in His Word. Why? Because isn't it the case that the more we get to know someone we love, the more we love them?

And the more that we get to know and to love Jesus, the more we will want to share Him with others. As we commit to worshipping together on Sundays, spending time in community groups, reading and reflecting daily on God's Word, let's pray that our love would grow and flow from us. Let's band together for shared strength. Whenever you watch the church in the book of Acts, you think about the pattern of Jesus sending His followers two by two, we recognize that we're made for community. If you're like me, not a bold person, but you know someone who is bold, watch them, learn from them, stick close to them, partner with them. And remember, mission is the work of the church. And finally, let's depend on the Spirit. What do we know about the Spirit? Well, He is truly God.

And He is passionate about the glory of Jesus. He is with us to lead us and to teach us and to give us power. And we know that every single Christian has the Spirit of Christ living in us. So we have within us individually and collectively the source of true boldness, the one who wants the world to come, to see and to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. Let's pray.