

Acts 4

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I don't know how many of you have ever been to Times Square in New York City. It's a busy place. If you've been there, apart from during the times of COVID, you would have been one of some 200,000 to 300,000 people who pass through Times Square each day.

Two to 300,000 people go through Times Square each day in New York City. Now, if you've been there, there would be a good chance that there might have been someone preaching hellfire and brimstone, standing in the midst of all those people and letting them know that they needed to repent.

Now, on one level, we can understand why someone would do that in that place. I mean, 200,000 to 300,000 people, that's a lot of people, and it might be considered strategic. I mean, it's one of the busiest places on the planet.

And if there's a hope of getting the message out to a multitude, well, as I said, it could be considered strategic. Now, some might think that that takes courage. But in truth, having a conversation with your thoroughly secular co-worker or childhood friend is more intimidating. That fellow in Times Square, frankly, is just more noise. And more often than not, people walk right by him and pay him absolutely no attention. And that's why I say speaking with a co-worker or a childhood friend or a neighbor can be more intimidating, more threatening.

[1 : 2 6] See, standing in the midst of a huge throng of people who are walking about paying little attention to you might require some kind of boldness.

But it's not the kind of boldness our brothers and sisters are praying for in this passage from Acts. See, they're facing opposition, significant opposition. And they're praying that they will have the courage to not be intimidated, that they'll not draw back, but will press on in getting the word out. This incident is the last in an account that really started in Acts chapter 3. And in there we see the healing of a beggar who had been lame from birth.

Peter teaches, preaches the gospel to the crowd that gathered in response to the healing. Peter and John are then arrested by Jewish leaders. They're held overnight. And the next day they're brought before the Sanhedrin, as we saw, and asked, By what power, by what name did you do this?

And Peter, again, he preaches the gospel, tells them that the healing was accomplished in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, who God raised from the dead. The leaders, they're unable to challenge them.

[2 : 3 6] But after a conversation among themselves, the rulers warn Peter and John to speak no more to anyone of these things. And this leads to that famous response in the part of Peter and John, 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.

After further threatening, what happens? The rulers let them go. Peter and John return to their friends, and they relate. All that transpired. And what do they do in response? They ask for boldness.

Let's get some clarity on what they are asking for. What do we understand? What do we mean by this term boldness? Now boldness is not brashness.

It's not being aggressive. It's not yelling at people. The word is frankly used a lot in the New Testament, and depending on the context, it can be translated as confidence, courage, candor, speaking openly, speaking plainly, frankness, and indeed boldness.

You might recall when Jesus speaks somewhat cryptically, and then finally he says something, and his disciples go, Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech.

[3 : 51] Same word. When the high priest is questioning Jesus, he says, I've spoken openly to the world. I've always taught in synagogues and in the temple. Same word.

Spoken openly. In Hebrews, it says that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Again, there's the same term now being translated as confidence. See, as we briefly went through the events of this story, Peter and John faced opposition from the Jewish leaders.

They were imprisoned, threatened, told to no longer talk about Jesus. And when they come back to their fellow believers and relate to them all that had happened, we read how they prayed, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

That's what we want to consider tonight. Speaking with boldness. In the face of opposition, real or anticipated, we ask God for boldness.

[4 : 58] Now, because after hearing the apostles' account, our brothers and sisters are inspired by their example to pray for boldness, I think it would be helpful for us to look at that encounter and see what enabled the apostles to speak as they did in the face of opposition.

And I'm going to suggest it's four things. It's being empowered by the Holy Spirit. It's being absolutely persuaded as to who Jesus was. That they had conviction as to the necessity of getting that message out.

And lastly, their love for Christ and their love for the lost. So it's the power of the Holy Spirit. They're being persuaded as to who Jesus was. They felt the necessity of getting the message out and their love for Christ and the lost.

So let's take these in order. First, the Holy Spirit. When they had set them in the midst, it says in verse 7, they inquired, by what power and by what name did you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them.

Now, early on in his ministry, Jesus anticipates these kinds of moments. Prior to sending out the 12 to declare the kingdom of heaven is at hand, he offers an extended explanation as to what will happen and why.

[6 : 08] But it begins like this. I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents, innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to the courts and flog you in their synagogues.

And you'll be dragged before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given you in that hour.

For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you. See, the Holy Spirit is God's empowerment, God's gift of empowerment for his people.

You might recall in the Gospel of John how Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit is our helper, that he will teach, that he will bring to remembrance the things that Jesus taught, that he will bear witness to Jesus, and that they too will bear witness to Jesus.

He says, I will send him to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

[7 : 11] Then after his resurrection, right, you'll recall, he tells them to wait there in Jerusalem so they will be clothed with power from on high. And he says, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will all be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

And then in obedience, what happens? They wait. They wait, as Jesus says. And as they waited, suddenly, what happens? There came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, accompanied by the appearance of dividing tongues of fire, rested on each one of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And the people say, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. So the Holy Spirit is God's gift for empowerment for ministry. And what's important to note is that it is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, is that empowerment for ministry.

See, we learn elsewhere that the Holy Spirit is already dwelling in these disciples because they put their faith in Jesus, and they've been made children of God, and that's something that cannot happen apart from God's Spirit coming and causing them to be born again.

What does Jesus say? Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. I say to you, unless one is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

[8 : 30] And so with that new birth comes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit be with us and in us forever. But I say this is important to note because what Jesus promised, that believers would receive power to be his witnesses, even in the face of opposition, remains as true for us as it did for Peter and John as they stood before the Jewish council.

Now, Peter and John experienced that empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The early church was inspired by that empowerment, and they asked for boldness to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, it says, and continue to speak the word of God with what? With boldness. So our first resource is the indwelling and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

He dwells in us and he's ready to empower us, to be bold, to be open, to be confident, to speak with candor. So the second thing, to be absolutely persuaded as to who Jesus was, his person and his work.

Now, in chapter 4 of Acts, we saw that the apostles and the other believers saw the events of Jesus as fulfilling scripture. All right, what does Peter explain to the Sanhedrin?

[9 : 49] This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And then later we learn how the believers see what has been going on, hear this report, and what do they do?

They quote, Why do the Gentiles rage in the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. This use of scripture is true also in all of the gospel accounts.

Each of the gospel writers cites scripture to back up their claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Paul does the same thing. He goes into synagogues and he seeks to persuade the Jews from the scriptures that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

And Jesus himself, right? After the resurrection, he's walking with those two disciples in the road to Emmaus. And what does it say? He interpreted the scriptures beginning with Moses and all the prophets to show how it all concerned himself.

So for the readers of the gospel accounts, or the Jews in the synagogue to whom Paul was speaking, or the two who walked along the road to Emmaus with Jesus, the use of scriptures to back up claims about Jesus carries weight.

[10 : 58] The scriptures were authoritative. And if it could be proven from the scriptures that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, there would be those who would hear and believe.

But I dare say, for you and me, we will come across very few who allow the scriptures to carry that kind of authority when we bear witness to Jesus.

The point, however, the point, however, is not that they believe in the scriptures, but that you and I do. Not that they believe in the scriptures, but that you and I do.

That we believe with absolute confidence that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Son of God, as the Bible abundantly demonstrates. See, if one has doubts as to the veracity of the Bible, or its applicability to 21st century life, or its outlook on existence, then we'll not be emboldened by it.

See, we'll not speak with confidence in all that it teaches and explains about who God is, who we are, why the world is as it is, and why we need Jesus. If we're going to be confident, unintimidated in the face of opposition, even if we never quote a Bible verse to anybody, we ourselves need to be persuaded that what the Bible teaches is true in all of its parts, with all of its difficulties, in all of its challenges, in all of its glory.

[12 : 23] Now, this is necessary because it's in the Bible that we learn about Jesus. We're going to go on and talk in just a few minutes about our own personal experience and how that plays into it, but our rule for understanding or evaluating our own experience is what?

It's the Bible. So if the Bible is not authoritative for us, then we'll not speak truly about Jesus. And if we do not speak truly about Jesus, no matter how bold or frank or forthright we do so, we will not be joining our brothers and sisters in Acts 4 who ask to continue to speak God's word with all boldness.

See, they certainly see what transpired as fulfilling scripture and therefore verifies the person and work of Christ. But also, they walked with Jesus. What does Peter say in verse 19?

We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. See, they were there when Jesus fed the multitude from a boy's lunch.

They were there when Jesus calmed the winds and the waves, when he raised a widow's son from the dead, went out of mercy and a desire to heal. He crossed the threshold of Matthew's house to eat with Matthew's friends, his fellow tax collectors and sinners.

[13 : 40] When he taught with authority, when he silenced the Pharisees, when he forgave sins, when he clothed himself as a slave and washed their feet, when he predicted his death and resurrection, when he ascended on a cloud, the Son of Man returning to receive the glory that he had with the Father before the world began.

And then when they experienced the outpouring of the Spirit as Jesus had promised, proving to them that he indeed ascended to the right hand of the Father. See, by all of these experiences and more, they were absolutely persuaded that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

But there's even one more aspect to this. They said, 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.

Now, we like to interpret that positively, that they had been with Jesus. But the reality is that that's not how they saw it. The council were favorably impressed, but the reason for it is because it says they were uneducated men.

Then, see, Jesus was confident. They'd seen this behavior before. Jesus was confident. He was assured. He was bold in his interactions with those who opposed him. And why was that?

[14 : 55] Because Jesus knew who he was and what he had come to do. And his self-designation, Son of Man, used by him over 80 times, says as much, right? Let alone his extraordinary statements, such as when he claims that he and the Father are one and that before Abraham was, I am, invoking the holy name of God.

So when confronted by Peter and John, the men on the council had encountered this kind of behavior before. And then there's the fact that Peter and John, as it was described, that they were uneducated common men.

And by this they meant not that they were illiterate or unintelligent, but they had no advanced training in the scriptures. You know, they marveled to Jesus for the same thing. John 7, the Jews therefore marveled, saying, how is it that this man has learning when he has never studied?

They had been with Jesus. See, the fact that they were recognized as having been with Jesus meant that they had been shaped by Jesus. And they were not the same sort of men that they were when Jesus first said to them, follow me.

The Holy Spirit was transforming them more and more into the likeness of Jesus, and it showed. So Jesus knew who he was, and they knew who they were.

[16 : 10] They were disciples of Jesus. See, here's where your testimony, your own personal experience, your account of life with Jesus becomes a resource for you to speak boldly.

See, if you have been with Jesus, and you're not any longer the person that you were when he said, follow me, well, then you know what you would have been capable of apart from Jesus, but here you are now.

You've been changed. You've been transformed. You're new. And then that should give us a confidence, an unashamedness of speaking about Christ to others.

So our confidence in the Bible and our personal experience of Jesus fuels our ability to speak boldly of the person and work of Christ. So we have the Holy Spirit's empowerment, and we have a confidence that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, in the testimony of Scripture and in our own life.

Thirdly, I suggest it was their conviction as to the necessity of making that message known. And we're going to look at this in two ways, an objective necessity and a subjective necessity.

[17 : 24] Listen to what Peter says to the Sanhedrin. This is verse 11 and 12. This Jesus is a 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. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we

must be saved.

Now the exclusivity of that statement, it sounds very discordant in our pluralistic society. And there is an unpopular assertion in that statement that human beings, all human beings, need to be saved. And then there is assertion that that salvation comes only through Jesus. Now whether that's popular or not, that's the reality of it. That's what Paul says. There's no distinction.

All of sin and fall short of the glory of God are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

[18 : 27] Now if that's the case, if that's the case that all people need to be saved and there's salvation in no one else except Jesus, if that's the case, then boldness is called for.

For there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Because Paul goes on to say, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, but how then will they call on him whom they have believed?

And how are they going to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they going to hear without someone preaching? This is why we need to ask for boldness to speak God's word. That's the objective necessity. People need a savior and it's only Jesus. The subject of necessity also plays into this. Listen again what Peter says, 18 and 19. 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. See, the defense that Peter gives in that statement is that he had received an assignment, a commission from God to speak and teach about Jesus.

[19 : 48] And it certainly superseded any command that they would want to hand out to the contrary. See, all of the apostles, you'll recall, they would be commissioned by Jesus to go into all the world and make the gospel known.

This was an assignment from the master and he was, and Peter was in no place to yield to the threats of the council. That sense of obligation is present in Paul.

I'm under obligation, both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to Jews, both to the wise and the foolish. And he tells elsewhere, if I preach the gospel that gives me no ground for boasting, for necessity is laid upon me.

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. See, Paul viewed his calling as a stewardship, something entrusted to him for the benefit of the master. And he instructs Timothy to guard the deposit, the true deposit, the true gospel that was entrusted to him.

So, there's not only this objective necessity, there's also a subjective necessity to get the message out. Yeah, Peter and John, their friends, Gavin and Jerusalem, they felt keenly the necessity to get the message out.

[20 : 55] So, what do they do? They ask for boldness. And if we are persuaded that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which people must be saved, that necessity presses in on us.

Now, again, in a pluralistic society, we might feel inclined to soften the message, to not be so exclusive. But I suggest that exclusivity is not the issue.

There is nothing more inclusive than the gospel. As Paul teaches, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus, right, in Galatians.

So, in the midst of a fractious, divided, competitive, pluralistic world, God is disclosing through the bold speaking of God's word by his people the mystery of his will according to his purpose, a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven, things on earth.

So, how might we speak boldly like the apostles and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit? We have confidence into who Jesus is, persuaded what the scriptures teach, and also in our own experience, knowing we know Jesus.

[22 : 07] But then there's also this necessity. If we look upon the people around us and we see that they need to be saved, and there's no other name given among heaven, under heaven, given among men by which they must be saved, then we've got to talk about Jesus.

The last I suggested was love. Do you remember when Peter denied Jesus three times?

And the account in Luke is the one that moved me the most. After that, the rooster, after he denied Jesus the third time, Luke records, immediately while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed, and

the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

Jesus turned and looked at Peter. What was in that look? Was it disdain? Disappointment? Anger? I don't think so. I think it was love. Comprehending, compassionate, merciful love. A look that said, oh, Peter.

[23 : 15] Peter, you who said you would never deny me, you who said that you would die before denying me, rash, unthinking, impetuous Peter, my rock.

Now it goes the way it's supposed to go. Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.

And he went out and he wept bitterly. But how does Jesus restore Peter? Seen, right?

Post-resurrection, disciples have gone off fishing, seemingly unsure of what to do.

John in his gospel records, just as the day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore. See, they had been out fishing. That's what fishermen do. Yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, children, do you have any fish? They answered him, no. And he said to them, we'll cast a net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. So they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of the fish.

[24 : 20] That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, it is the Lord. So in time when Peter heard that, it was the Lord, he put off his outer garment, he stripped for the works and he threw himself into the sea.

And then later they're sharing a meal with Jesus. And you know what John records. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me?

Do you love me more than these? And he said to them, yes Lord, you know that I love you. And he said to him, feed my lambs. And he said a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And he said, yes Lord, you know that I love you.

And he said to him, tend my sheep. He said to him a third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me?

And he said to him, Lord, you know everything you know that I love you Jesus said to him feed my sheep then he goes on and says this truly truly I say to you when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted but when you're old you'll stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go and John comments this he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God and after that Jesus said to him follow me such merciful restoring grace would have been hard for Peter to push to the back of his mind see when Peter boldly says to the council we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard it would include the miracles the authoritative teaching but it must also have included that scene beside the scene see it's Jesus love for Peter and Peter's love for Jesus that is led to the scene before the Sanhedrin

[26 : 08] Jesus said to follow him and following Jesus has brought Peter into the courts of these religious leaders and consider again how Jesus warned him that he would face opposition even to the point of death see we believe because of a long line of believers who spoke God's word boldly confidently and behind it all is the love that Jesus has for his father and the love that Jesus has for his people see Jesus said Jesus said that you are to love me and if you love me you will be doing my will behind it all is this love of Jesus for the father the love that the father has for Jesus the love that Jesus has for people and for those who will believe in him because of our boldly speaking God's word again from Jesus high priestly prayer the glory that you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one

I in them you in me that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you have loved me so what's the last provocation for us to speak God's word with boldness it's love it's love the love of the father and the son and the holy spirit the divine love that caused us to believe in the one whom in whom there is salvation and no other because there is no other name under heaven given among men by which people must be saved and love for others who if they're experiencing salvation if they are to escape God's judgment it must be it must be that they believe in Jesus again because there is salvation in no other so opposition opposition is inevitable because we we are certain of things that are counter cultural but even more than that when we assert the primacy of Christ we are at the same time saying that what other people believe is misguided it's wrong we follow the master who has called everyone's assumptions into question he said he was hated by the world and that we will be hated so we should expect that we will have opposition but we should also expect that we will have a hearing why is that?

