

We Cannot Stop Speaking

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Preacher: Pastor David

[0:00] This is our second week back in the book of Acts, and this morning we'll be continuing in Acts chapter 4. So if you're using one of the Bibles from the seat around you, hopefully you'll find that on page 912.

912. And I would encourage you to open a copy of the Bible to follow along this morning. But before we begin in verse 13, let's briefly remind ourselves where we are.

Acts is ultimately a book about Jesus. And you remember that Luke's gospel recorded what Jesus began to do and teach during his earthly ministry.

The book of Acts records what the risen and exalted Jesus continues to do and teach from heaven by his spirit through the witnesses he's commissioned.

So in Acts 1, we saw Jesus commission his witnesses. In Acts 2, he empowers them by pouring out his Holy Spirit.

[1:12] And then in Acts 3, hopefully you remember, the risen Jesus works through Peter and John to heal a man who has been lame from birth.

And when a crowd gathers, Peter immediately directs their attention toward Jesus. He proclaims that the Jesus they crucified has been raised from the dead and he calls the people to repent and turn to him.

But that message also draws opposition. The first official opposition that we see in the book of Acts. So at the beginning of Acts 4, the temple authorities arrest Peter and John and bring them before the Sanhedrin, Jerusalem's supreme governing council.

And you hopefully remember that the council demands, by what power or by what name did you do this? Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter answers boldly, this man was healed by the name of Jesus, the Messiah from Nazareth, the one they had crucified, but whom God had raised from the dead. And then Peter concludes with the precious and powerful words in verse 12. When he says, There is salvation in no one else.

[2:41] For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. So, last week we heard what Peter said to the council.

This morning, beginning in verse 13, Luke shows us how the council responds. So, as we step back into the council room with Peter, John, and the lame man who's been healed, remember that everything seems to favor the council.

They have the position, the education, the authority, the power to punish. Peter and John stand before them with none of those advantages.

But, the council is about to discover that the decisive power in the room does not belong to them. Because the risen Jesus is still at work.

And as these powerful men search for a way to stop the message about this name, they will repeatedly discover what they cannot do. They cannot explain the witnesses, answer the evidence, deny the miracle, or prevent the name from spreading.

[3:58] And before the scene ends, we'll hear the witnesses declare what they cannot do. They cannot stop speaking because no one can stop Jesus.

Now, before we jump right into it, would you just allow me to pray again one more time? Let's pray. Father, we come to your word. And we know that if your spirit does not take your word and apply it in our lives, that we're unable naturally to discern the truth.

So, Father, we ask that you would do that very work. The work we cannot do. That you would take the words of life and speak them by your spirit to our souls.

Help us to see Jesus more clearly. Help our hearts to be filled with adoration for him. Father, bring life out of death.

[5:02] And may we bring glory to your name. Father, we ask these things that Christ might be exalted. That we might see him anew.

In Jesus' name. Amen. So, Acts 4, starting in verse 13. Acts 4, 13.

And the first response that we're going to see from the council is not repentance, but astonishment. We cannot believe it.

We cannot believe it. Follow along verse 13. It says, Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and they perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astonished, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

The religious leaders see the boldness of Peter and John, and they're astonished. They can't believe what's happening before their very eyes. Now, we know from verse 8, that the boldness comes from them being filled with the Holy Spirit.

[6:16] But the Sanhedrin's caught off guard. You see, Peter and John have no formal religious training. They haven't been to any of the Sanhedrin-approved religious schools.

Yet, they handle Scripture with confidence and authority. Surrounded by the most powerful religious leaders in Israel, they speak plainly.

They feel no need to soften their message or to defend themselves. And the council wasn't expecting such extraordinary response for men of such ordinary status.

You remember, these common fishermen are not speaking in a group of their friends, surrounded by people who are rooting for them, that want them to succeed.

They're on trial in front of the most powerful, most highly trained religious leaders in all of Israel.

Yet, Peter and John are not evasive.

[7:20] They're not defensive. They're not even slightly apologetic about Jesus. I think the council expected them to shrink under their scrutiny.

But instead, it's the leaders that are taken aback. And although this is extraordinary, the leaders had encountered something like it before.

In Jesus himself, you remember, he too had no formal religious training, yet handled Scripture with astonishing boldness and absolute authority.

And now the leaders are seeing something remarkably familiar in Peter and John. But notice how the council naturally thinks of their association with Jesus in the past tense.

These men had been with Jesus. Which I think that shows us they missed the whole point of what Peter has just told them. Jesus is not merely a dead teacher whose influence can continue to be seen in his former disciples.

[8:30] The Jesus that Peter has just proclaimed is alive. He's still at work. The boldness that the religious leaders are witnessing in Peter and John is the evidence that the risen Christ is presently working in these ordinary men by his Spirit.

Now, I believe Luke wants us to see that Christ's witness is not confined to those who are highly educated or to those who are practiced and polished or to those who are naturally impressive.

You see, some of us remain silent because we imagine that we need one more answer. We need to read one more book. We need to take one more course. We need just a little bit more self-confidence, assurance, and then Jesus can use us.

But the most important qualification is not that people be impressed with us. It's that they recognize that we belong to Jesus. That we're being formed by his Word, by his Spirit.

The second reaction that we see from the leaders is we cannot oppose it.

[9:56] We cannot oppose it. Continuing in Acts 4.14, it reads, But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

So in verse 13, the council's astonished by the witnesses, but in verse 14, they're silenced by the evidence. Now, remember, Peter has just said in verse 10 that this man is standing before you well.

And now Luke again repeats this when he tells us the council saw the man who was healed standing beside them. The religious leaders don't just have Peter's testimony to contend with.

They have the man. The man who's been lame from birth. The man who is well known and recognized. And who's now standing right there in their courtroom, completely healed.

The man doesn't have to say anything. He simply stands beside Peter and John. His presence, its own powerful testimony. Now, the council can question Peter's interpretation.

[11:12] They can resent the name that Peter's proclaimed. But every time they look for an answer, the evidence is standing directly in front of them.

They want to dismiss Peter's message, but there he stands. They want to deny the miracle, but there he stands.

They want to stop the name of Jesus from spreading. But there he stands. His body has become evidence that they cannot explain away.

So, before the council can silence the witnesses, they must somehow account for the man that's now standing right there before them.

And Luke tells us plainly, they have nothing to say. The third response that we see from the Sanhedrin is, we cannot deny it.

[12:09] We cannot deny it. Continuing in verse 15. It reads, 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. So, in verse 14, we see the religious leaders' public silence. They have no answer to give. But now, in verses 15 and 16, we see their private admission. They cannot deny the sign.

The council's problems, no longer whether something's happened. It's, what are they going to do about what they cannot deny? Now, once Peter and John are dismissed, the council kind of erupts in deliberation back and forth.

What shall we do with these men? But I think it's worth noticing what they're not asking. They're not asking, is Jesus really the risen Messiah?

[13:18] Does salvation really depend on him? What must we do in response to the great and glorious thing God has done?

No, and instead of reconsidering Peter's interpretation of the scripture and the evidence is standing right before them, they begin devising a response, a plan.

So the council has the miracle, the healed man, they have the apostles' testimony, they have Peter's explanation, and they even have the scriptures. Yet, they still refuse to believe.

The evidence has silenced their objections, but it has not softened their hearts. If you remember back to Acts 2, when Peter preaches to the crowd, the crowd asks, what shall we do?

And that question leads them to repentance. But here, the council asks, what shall we do with these men? And their response leads them towards hiding or suppressing the truth.

[14:32] You see, the problem is not that the evidence is unclear. The problem is that the conclusion's unwelcome. A heart determined not to submit to Jesus will eventually stop asking, is this true?

And start asking, how can I keep this truth from disrupting my life? That's exactly what these leaders have done. They've moved on from evaluating evidence to managing the problem, to damage control.

But maybe the more alarming truth is how often this very thing happens in our own hearts. Right? A person can stop asking, is Jesus truly Lord? Because the more frightening question is, if he is Lord, what will he require of me?

What will happen to my plans? To my relationships? To my reputation? To my control over my own life? And often, at that point, unbelief may no longer be an honest search for the truth.

[15:46] It can easily become an effort to keep unwelcome truth at a safe distance. You see, the council doesn't need another sign or better evidence.

It needs to be willing to humbly accept the truth that's undeniable. And then turn to the risen Christ. Now, the next response we see from the leaders is, we cannot allow it.

We cannot allow it. Continuing in verse 17. It says, 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.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. So having failed to answer the apostles or deny the evidence, the council now turns from argument to coercion.

The message, Peter's just proclaimed, that the crucified Jesus is alive and that salvation is found in him alone. In the leaders' minds, this cannot be allowed to spread.

[17:06] So the council does the only thing they really can do. They warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name. But did you notice how comprehensive the order is?

To speak no more to anyone at all in the name of Jesus. So not to the crowd and not to another person.

Not in public teaching, not in private conversation. The council's not asking them to change their messaging or to repackage it or to make it more acceptable.

It's demanding the disappearance of the name of Jesus from their lips. Now, most of us have never received an official order forbidding us to speak about Christ.

Often, the pressure that we have is quieter. We know which friend might think less of us or which family conversation will be uncomfortable or which room will suddenly feel colder if we speak plainly about Jesus.

[18:18] So really, no one has to command us to be silent if fear or anxiety or embarrassment can persuade us to silence ourselves.

So the conflict between the apostles and the religious leaders has become explicit. It's become very clear.

Will the name of Jesus be silenced? You see, Jesus has commissioned Peter and John to be his witnesses. And the religious leaders now command them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Now, Peter and John cannot obey both. The council demands, you must not speak. But we see Peter and John answer, we cannot remain silent.

We cannot stop speaking. We cannot stop speaking. Continuing in verse 19, it says, But Peter and John answered them, Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.

[19:32] For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. Now, although Peter's been portrayed as the primary speaker throughout this whole scene, Notice that Peter and John now answer the council with a single unified voice.

From the council's perspective, rejecting its command meant rejecting the recognized religious authority in Israel. But Peter and John know that the council has placed itself in direct opposition to God's command.

For to obey Jesus is to obey God. So, in turn, they call the council to judge for itself. Can it ever be right in God's sight to obey a human authority when that authority requires disobedience to God?

I think the text gives us a very clear principle that's worth remembering. When a human authority commands what God has forbidden, or forbids what God has commanded, God must be obeyed.

Let me say that again. When a human authority commands what God has forbidden, or forbids what God has commanded, God must be obeyed.

[20:59] But it's important to notice what obedience to God looks like here. Right? Peter and John do not attack the council.

They don't threaten violence. They don't organize a rally or an uprising. And they don't even reject their authority altogether. Honestly, I think if this confrontation happened in our own day, we would recognize that their example would not even give us permission to respond with contempt.

To mock our opponents or misrepresent them or use public outrage to humiliate them. The very things that we Christians are too often tempted to do these days on social media.

No, Peter and John respectfully and openly refuse one particular command. Because it directly contradicts Christ's command.

Jesus explicitly commissioned them to be his witnesses. The council explicitly commands them not to witness. So this isn't personal preference versus submission to a legitimate authority.

[22:16] It's God's clear, revealed command versus a contradictory human command. Peter and John aren't merely saying, Hey, we have the right to speak. They're saying, We cannot stop speaking.

Or literally, they're saying, We are not able to not speak. And the explicit pronoun really adds even more emphasis. So it's more like, As for us, we must speak.

There's no hesitation. There's no attempt at evasion. And as a matter of fact, there really isn't even an inference that the apostles will consider the religious leader's command.

Peter and John are saying, You must judge what you believe is right. But as for us, we know what we must do. We must speak about what we have seen and heard.

And we're willing to accept the consequences. So we need to see that at the heart of this verse, it's not primarily political liberty. It's gospel compulsion.

[23:23] I also think it's worth recognizing, Who is saying we cannot stop speaking? Right? This is Peter. The man who once insisted that he'd never deny Jesus, and then before the night was over,

denied three times that he even knew him.

Right? Fear compelling him to say, I don't know the man. But now, before the highest religious court in the land, in front of the council that actually condemned Jesus, we see the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit having transformed Peter into a man who says, I cannot stop speaking about him.

Now, can I just be a little transparent for a minute? This section of the sermon was really the most challenging and humbling and ultimately encouraging part of my sermon preparation.

You see, as I worked through it, I started by focusing on my own performance in light of this gospel compulsion that makes Peter and John not able to not speak.

Asking myself questions like, why does speaking about Jesus feel so optional to me? What makes me so reluctant to make his name known in certain situations?

[24 : 55] Do I see the gospel merely as information to affirm or as news that's too good to keep silent?

Or maybe the worst question, why are there so many other things, so many lesser things that I'm more excited and eager to talk about than Jesus?

You know, wrestling with those questions, I felt pretty convicted. I feel ashamed about how easily I can want to talk about other things when what I really want to talk about is Jesus.

But the more I studied it, the more I realized Luke doesn't want to leave us staring at ourselves, measuring our courage, counting our failures, and promising that we're going to try harder the next time.

Because if we leave here merely saying, I need to be braver, then we've missed the deepest source of Peter and John's boldness.

[26 : 12] You see, they cannot stop speaking because they knew without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was alive. They'd walked with him. They'd heard his teaching.

They'd seen his miraculous works. They knew he had been crucified and buried. And yet, they saw him alive again.

And for 40 days, Jesus gives them proof after proof that he'd been raised from the dead. They'd heard him commission them to be his witnesses.

They watched him ascend into heaven. They received the Holy Spirit just as he promised. And now, everywhere, everywhere they looked, they could see that Jesus was still working.

Saving sinners, healing the helpless, building his church. So how could they remain silent? You see, they're not trying to manufacture excitement about a religious idea.

[27 : 16] They're bearing witness to a living Savior, the risen Christ. And although we can never be eyewitnesses in the same unique way that Peter and John were, we have their testimony.

Right? In the Scriptures, we hear what they heard. We see what they saw. We behold the crucified and risen Christ.

And through his word and by his spirit, we come to know without a shadow of a doubt that he's still alive, that he's still reigning, that he's still saving sinners, and that he's still building his church.

So, our greatest need is not to stare harder at our failures. Our greatest need is to see more of Jesus. Because when Christ becomes real to us, more real to us than our fear, and his glory becomes greater, greater than our embarrassment, and his salvation becomes more precious than the approval of the people around us, we'll be excited to speak more about him.

Now, that speaking will not always look like preaching to a crowd. It may just be naming the hope of Christ when a neighbor tells you that they're struggling or they're afraid.

[28 : 53] It might be answering your children's questions with more than just a moral lesson. It might be telling a grieving friend why death does not have to have the last word.

Or maybe it'll just be saying gently, but clearly, Jesus has been so merciful to me. The council thought its problem was Peter and John.

they thought perhaps if they threatened these two men severely enough, they could frighten them into silence. That perhaps if they silenced the witnesses, they could silence the name.

But the council had greatly misunderstood the situation because the power behind the witness was not Peter and John, it was Jesus. Jesus. So, they could threaten those who spoke his name, but they had no power over the one whose name they spoke.

And they could command Peter and John to be silent, but they could not silence the one who had called them. And they could attempt to stop the witnesses, but to stop their witness, they would have to stop Jesus.

[30:18] And just honestly, Jesus had already passed through their rejection, through their crucifixion, through death itself and the grave.

They had tried to stop him before, and they couldn't stop him then. And they can't stop him now. And that brings us to the final, the greatest cannot in the passage.

We cannot stop Jesus. We cannot stop Jesus. Acts 4, 21 and 22 says, 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 40 years old. You see, Peter and John have plainly declared they will continue speaking about Jesus regardless of the consequences.

And how does the council respond? With more threats. But threats are all they have. They can't refute the apostles' message.

[31:32] They can't deny the miraculous sign. And we see here they cannot punish Peter and John without placing themselves against a crowd of people who are praising God for what's happened.

So they threaten them again. And they let him go. Now, notice then that Luke reminds us that the man who had been healed was more than 40 years old.

I don't think that detail is incidental. I don't think that Luke got to this point in the story and was like, oh, I better remember to add that detail here. It's that 40 years is not merely a number.

It's a lifetime. That year after year this man had struggled with the same weakness, the same inability, and year after year he had lived his life in the same dependence upon others.

And year after year the people passed him at the temple gate, including the religious leaders themselves in this very room.

[32:37] and all of them knew there was nothing they could do to make this man walk. But then, then the name, the name that the council once silenced made him stand.

And now his standing body testifies to the power of the risen Jesus. So the council can threaten the witnesses, but it can't erase the sign. And they can try to command silence, but they can't even prevent the people from praising God.

And even though they might oppose the name of Jesus, they cannot stop Jesus from continuing his work. So, as the scene closes, look at what remains.

The witnesses are still going to speak. The healed man is still standing. The people are still praising God, and Jesus is still building his church.

Now, I don't mean to imply that opposition is not real. You see, following Jesus has always been costly throughout history.

[33:52] And for many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, it's extremely costly even today. And the truth is, it might not be long before it's costly for us.

Because authorities possess enough power to threaten and to imprison and to inflict great suffering on Christ's people. But they never possess enough power to stop the risen Christ.

That should be the deepest source of confidence that we draw from this passage. It's not that Peter and John are unusually impressive men. The council has already said, these are just some ordinary guys.

No, our confidence is that Jesus is alive. And the gospel continues advancing, not because of the impressiveness of its messengers or the condition of the church.

It continues advancing because Jesus is alive. And through his spirit, he continues to empower his people. So the answer to our own temptation towards silence is not merely gritting our teeth and trying harder.

[35:09] It's certainly not waiting for greater confidence in ourselves. So we can't end this passage admiring the apostles' courage, but we need to look where they looked to the crucified Jesus, the one whom God raised from the dead, to the reigning Christ who poured out his spirit, who saved sinners, who's building his church.

Now, these leaders knew that the miracle had happened. They admitted they couldn't deny it, but instead of submitting to Jesus, they tried to silence his name.

Perhaps this morning you might recognize something of yourself in them. Maybe you know what the evidence says, but you're unwilling to follow where it leads.

perhaps you're trying to silence the truth in your own heart, or maybe even trying to keep others from speaking it. Perhaps you haven't rejected Jesus outright.

Maybe you simply tried to keep him at a manageable distance. You're willing to allow him to comfort you, but not to rule you. You're willing to admire him, but not to entrust your life to him.

[36 : 39] You know what the evidence says, but you fear what his lordship might change. Let me challenge you, don't make the same mistake these leaders made.

Knowing the truth about Jesus is not the same as trusting him. Recognizing the evidence is not the same as receiving the Savior.

You see, the Jesus whom they rejected is alive. He did die for sinners, but he rose from the grave, and he's promised to save everyone who comes to him in repentance and faith.

Now, the good news is that means you don't have to clean yourself up first. You don't have to prove yourself worthy. You don't have to earn his mercy. Turn from your sin, your selfishness, your pride. Place your trust in him. You know, the Lord, whose authority you might fear, is also the Savior who gave himself so that sinners like you and me could be saved.

[37 : 55] So come to him and he will save you. The truth is there's no other Savior to whom you can turn, and there's no other name in which salvation can be found.

So don't harden your hearts or postpone the decision. Stop trusting your own goodness and entrust yourself to Jesus. Come to him as the Savior that you need and the Lord that he truly is.

And if you're here this morning and you're not sure about what the next step in your relationship with Jesus looks like, we'd love to answer that. We'd love to walk with you and help you.

Don't leave without talking to me or someone around you, because we want you to know the hope we've found in Christ. But if you're here this morning and you've come to Christ and you belong to him, then let me encourage you, don't merely ask, how can I become less afraid?

Or how can I be more bold? Instead, ask, how can I more clearly see the Savior who is greater than my fear? And then as you gaze on him, ask, who has God placed before me?

[39 : 15] Who needs to hear who Christ is, what he's done, and what he's done for me? You see, throughout history, there have been plenty of people who have tried to stop him that have opposed the name, and they couldn't stop him, and they can't stop him today.

And because the risen Jesus cannot be stopped, then his people cannot remain silent. Let's pray. Father, we come and we confess we do not love you as we should. We do not cherish Christ as we should.

Father, fuel the fire in our lives and our hearts and minds, that as we see Christ more clearly, our faith would be built up, as your spirit applies the truth of your word in our lives, that we wouldn't push it away, but let it do its work, fueling our devotion, our pursuit of Jesus.

And as we see him clearly, Father, enable us, give us a passion to make him known, make him the most important thing in our hearts and minds and our lives.

[40 : 42] Enable us to set all other things aside, and to hold him up in every situation. Father, we thank you that we have the opportunity to be here today.

We thank you that the gospel is true, that Jesus is alive, that our hope is in him, and that you are always to be found faithful to your promises.

promises. As we go out now, we ask that you would give us eyes to see those that you place in our life, wherever they might be, that we would have an opportunity to share with them the love that we have found in Christ, the hope that we have in him, that we would know how best to share with them who he is and what he's done, that we'd see more and more people come to love him, to worship him, to make much of him.

Lord, be glorified in our lives. In Jesus' name we ask, amen.