

Acts 4:1-22

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It is wonderful to be with you, worshipping our King in the new year together.

! I invite you to turn with me to Acts, I almost said Matthew, Acts chapter 4.! As you turn, I'll just remind ourselves of where we've been and what has been happening.

The Lord has come in the Holy Spirit to His people in Acts chapter 2. In Acts chapter 3, Peter heals a lame man in the name of our ascended King, Jesus Christ.

And from that, he preaches the gospel to those who are there in the temple courts. And today, we are going to see the aftermath.

I'm going to pray real quick because I need the Lord this hour and every hour. But especially, I approach this text with trepidation.

[1:15] So I'm going to pray again, just as Jordan has prayed for me. I'm going to pray for me too. And I'm going to pray for you too. Lord, we are, and Lord, this passage testifies that we in ourselves are inadequate.

And that we need you. Lord, I need you to communicate this well. To serve this church well.

Lord, I pray that you would fill up in me any insufficiency. By your spirit, Lord, would you make your word effective in the lives of your people. Lord, would you do this for your glory and for our good.

It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. What is it that makes Christians feel guilty? Well, honestly, nothing should.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is that in dying on the cross for our sins, as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

[2:35] And so all of our guilt and our shame and all of our shortcomings, they are washed away and filled up in the blood of our Redeemer. But we often still feel guilty, don't we?

We feel guilty over our remaining sin. Or our juvenile or hidden sin that remains.

As we are incompletely along the process of putting off the old man. Or our lack of putting on the new man.

Our growth and holiness. Our lack of fruit in the spirit. Sometimes we feel guilty over our doubts. Don't we?

Or our lack of evangelism. Our lack of evangelistic zeal. Or our lack of evangelistic know-how.

[3:40] Or fruit. Now, this passage can't address all of these issues. But it does address one of them. Our fear, I think, of evangelism.

And it brings that to the forefront. And that's because Peter here is going to demonstrate, as he stands before the Sanhedrin, who are going to interrogate him about his boldness for Christ.

He is going to stand there and he is going to declare boldly the gospel of Jesus in front of more opposition than you or I probably have ever faced.

He's going to be standing in front of the very people who convinced Pilate to crucify Jesus. And my guess is that this will do one of two things in us.

It will either bolster us and steal us to follow after his example. Or if we really give it the consideration, we really look at it and then look at our lives.

[4:44] It might guilt us. Loom large over our heads. As we see that we don't really measure up to this example. My guess is that we might come into this passage and feel burdened by it.

And feel inadequate, unable. But do you imagine that that is why the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to include this passage?

To guilt us? No. No. This was written to open our eyes and stiffen our spines and excite us into boldness for Christ and proclamation of the gospel.

In fact, that's what we're going to see even more of in the next passage. That the whole church can be bold like Peter. When we get to verse 31 next week, Lord willing, we will read, When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they all continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Just like Peter had. Just like Peter will today.

[6:00] How would you like to be free of your fear of evangelism? Well, this passage isn't going to give you that.

I suspect Peter was afraid. But in the Lord, he was bold in the midst of his fear. In fact, it's not boldness unless there's a threat, right?

If it's simple and easy, then that's not bold. That's just doing the same old thing. But what I pray for us is that the Lord would make us bold like Peter.

So let us see what he has in store for us in this passage as we begin in verse one. And as they, that's John and Peter, who had just healed the lame man and were preaching the gospel.

As they were speaking to the people. And this is again in the temple courts. The priests and the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them greatly annoyed.

Because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

[7:10] And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day. For it was already evening. If you remember from last week, that means that they've been there preaching for several hours because they got there in mid afternoon.

But many of those who had heard the word believed. And the number of the men came to be about 5,000. On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem.

With Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander. And all who were of the high priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired.

By what power? Or by what name did you do this? Now we've met the Sadducees before. And these named individuals here belonged to that party.

We met them before in the Gospel of Matthew. They're one of the major groups within Israel in the first century. Now in first century Judaism.

[8:14] With Rome controlling their whole country. The nation wasn't united in one practice of Judaism. The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Zealots.

Each had a different way of practicing their faith. And so they operated a little bit like religious denominations do today. And because it was a theocracy properly.

They also differed in how Israel should be restored to its independence. And so they operated a little bit like modern political parties. They wouldn't recognize that exact one-to-one correspondence.

But there's a flavor of both in each of the parties. The Zealots wanted to revolt. The Pharisees thought that if the nation was sufficiently holy, eventually God would send them their Messiah.

And so their legalism, as we saw in the book of Matthew, was tied to their messianic hope. The Essenes were a really interesting bunch. They were a group of doomsday monks, essentially.

[9:17] They thought that God was about to rain down judgment on the world. And so they escaped out into the desert and lived a very austere life of asceticism. And they thought they were going to ride out the end times, escape the wrath to come.

Now the Sadducees, the party that we're seeing mostly here today, essentially the party that ran the temple, there's the priestly class. Because Rome was using the temple as a means of controlling, essentially, this province of the Roman Empire, the priestly class had essentially become politicians.

They were pragmatists. To the point where they had essentially abandoned all the religion, the real vital religious life of Israel.

And we saw in the book of Matthew that they denied the resurrection. That feature is here today. It will feature again as Paul will set the Pharisees and the Sadducees against each other later in the book of Acts.

It's going to be, he's going to be playing them against each other. It's going to be kind of fun for us to watch. And so they had become so practical that they'd really denied the very faith that they pretended to practice, pretended to even lead in the nation of Israel.

[10:33] And so Peter and John here represent a very, a threat to them in at least three ways. First, they're preaching that Jesus is resurrected.

And that obviously contradicts their theology. They also are contradicting them by saying, not only is there resurrection in general, but they're saying Jesus of Nazareth is resurrected.

And that's a confrontation that's contradicting their conduct because they, again, are the ones who convinced Pilate on Good Friday.

They led the charge on convincing Pilate to have Jesus crucified. As we've seen in chapters two and chapter three, Peter told the crowds that they were responsible for Jesus' death.

How much more so with these individuals who are the immediate cause of convincing Pilate? And third, Peter and John here represent a whole movement that is against the Sadducees.

[11:51] Right? The conversion of their cause that we just saw here, the total men of 5,000, which probably means somewhere in the region of 15 to 20,000 total converts to Christ's way in the Jerusalem surrounding area in just a matter of months.

That's a substantial movement, especially next to their dead religion. As it was new and it was vibrant, nothing at all like the religion of the Sadducees.

And so Peter and John here represent a real threat to the Sadducees and to their temple machinery. But let's not forget that they pose a threat to Peter and John too, because they were in fact the same body that had recently convinced Pilate, the Roman governor, to crucify Jesus as an insurrectionist.

And maybe they could do it again to his followers. Because now their group is larger than Christ's ever was. And so when they say, verse 7, by what power or name did you do this?

They aren't asking a question because they're eager to hear the answer. Right? They didn't say, oh man, this lame guy is healed. He's been like that for 40 years and you've healed him.

[13:07] How did you do it? We're so interested. No. They know exactly what happened. And they hate it. Right? You don't arrest someone. Put them in jail.

Set them before a tribunal because you're genuinely interested in what they have to say. They knew exactly what had happened and they hated it. Likely their hope here is that this show of force, by arresting them, by putting them in prison overnight, by setting them before the ruling council, looming over them will be enough to silence the apostles.

But as we read now in verse 8, Peter reminds them why they're here, why they're all here.

Something wonderful has happened. Right? The Sadducees see this as something terrible. And Peter reminds, points out the irony. They're all here because something great has happened.

Verse 8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, here stand the chief priests, those in charge of the Lord's life-giving ministry of the temple.

[14:34] And here they stand accusing the apostles, who had just done a life-giving miracle, of being sinister in some way.

So Peter is, like, this is almost comical, right? There's irony thick in this. Peter's like, you're putting us on trial, on trial for a good deed?

Right? In the hands of a skilled attorney, just that, just that would probably have been enough to get them off the hook. But Peter here senses an opportunity, an opportunity to talk of Jesus.

And so he digs himself a hole, so to speak, because he continues, verse 10, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is no, or there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

[16:00] Let me connect a few dots here for you. In verse 12, Peter says, there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name.

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. That's the first dot. The second dot.

Back up just a few days in the narrative to chapter two, on the day of Pentecost, you might remember that he said something about being saved in a name.

In chapter two, verses 17 to 21, he cites the prophet Joel and concludes in verse 21 with these words. He says, It shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

These are tied together. Do you see that saved in the name? First dot is, there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Second, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

[17:13] So he's calling Jesus here, the Lord. And if we look back, here's the third dot. Or it lands. The Joel citation that he's quoting, Joel chapter two, verse 32, when he says, And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

If you go to Joel chapter two, your Bible probably has that word Lord in all caps. That, when the Old Testament has the name of the Lord in all caps, this Yahweh, the proper name of God, the covenant Lord of Israel.

Jesus is the only name in which salvation can be found. Salvation is found by calling on the name of the Lord. Jesus is the Lord.

And the Lord. By Lord, the scriptures are saying, the one, true, uncreated, self-existent creator God. Jesus isn't Lord like he's a very great leader. Jesus isn't Lord like he's the promised Davidic king, though he is those things. Jesus is Lord because he is the great I am.

[18:50] Friends, who went to the cross for you? Who was it? The great God of heaven who has life in himself, right?

Last week, the author of life took to himself a human nature so that he could suffer and die in the place of human beings.

And he conquered death, rising from the grave on the third day. So, to all who call on his name, that is, repent and believe, he offers pardon for our sins and life everlasting in his name.

That's the gospel. That is the central message of the Bible and of the Christian faith. And there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And friends, that's a controversial statement in the front of the Sadducees that day. And it has been a controversial statement every day since then. Right?

[20:14] There are some people who have no problem with there being only one way to God. One way to salvation. That's what most religious people have always thought. Cross cultures, right?

Now, certainly Israel in that day thought there was only one way to God. But some among them, like the Sadducees, didn't like this way, didn't think this was the way.

And that's still true today. The people who are fine with their being just one way to God don't like this way, don't think this is the way.

It's the message of Islam, for instance. It's also true today of even some who name the name of Jesus.

For instance, the Mormon and Jehovah's Witness churches use the name Jesus and say that there's only salvation in the name of Jesus. But by that, they mean something very, very, very different.

[21:18] Those churches think that Jesus is a very lofty but created being. Essentially, the greatest of the angels.

They do not believe, as Peter is very clearly explaining to us, no other name saved only by calling on the name of the Lord. The Lord is Yahweh.

Not by calling on the name of the Savior who is this Jesus, the biblical Jesus. They preach an altogether different Savior and salvation.

Others today and other periods have found verse 12 controversial because the idea that we need salvation at all is offensive and unacceptable in their eyes.

Some find the idea that salvation can only be in one name unacceptable because we live in a pluralist society in which now the word tolerance has sort of morphed.

[22:27] It means now not only that we respect people who hold different views than us and treat them well, but that we kind of have to affirm what they believe and if we don't, we're intolerant, we're the mean people.

I've heard evangelism called colonialism, imperialism, spiritual violence in the last years. But here's the thing, on the day Peter spoke it, and every day since then, everywhere it has been spoken, it doesn't matter if verse 12 is palatable to you and to me or to anyone.

It simply matters if it's true. And if it is, if Peter is right, if the one true God of heaven took on flesh, to die a sinner's death in the place of sinners, to offer them forgiveness and life, then the offer of the gospel isn't intolerant, unloving.

It's the kindest thing we can do for anyone ever in our lives. offering them the great kindness of the great king.

And so first I must ask, do you have salvation in his name? Do you? Because, friends, it's offered freely to you and it's found nowhere else.

[24:19] Have you called on the name of the Lord? Have you repented? Have you turned from self and sin to him in faith and entrusted yourself to him in his cross, in his resurrection, to be found in him?

And if you haven't, I call you. Will you this moment this day? Will you find salvation in his name? Run to him. And if you have, if you have found resurrection life in the king of glory, do you care for others to find salvation in his name?

Because, friends, there is no other name under heaven by which we might be saved. And so every person you've ever met needs, needs Jesus Christ.

Needs. us be in prayer for revival. Here, in our community, let us pray for missionaries across the globe.

[25:55] And, friends, let us, let each of us be eager to share the good news of this Jesus every day.

Let's be ready for it. Let's be eager for it. It is the most loving thing we can do. What is the outcome here?

What is the outcome? verse 13. Now, when they, that's the ruling council again, saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished when they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

them. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, what shall we do with these men?

For that a notable sign has been performed to them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. We cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

[27:16] So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom the sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old.

In this last section of today's passage, I want to, there's so much, but I want to draw out just one theme. It's that theme we began with, the outset today.

in verse 19, Peter demonstrates such incredible boldness and says, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you be the judge.

As for us, we are going to testify to Christ. The authorities in front of them had just commanded them not to preach in the name of Jesus.

[28:41] What do the authorities, so to speak, today, tell us that would keep us from sharing the gospel? Our culture tells us that it is impolite to talk about religion and politics.

Except people really love talking about politics. It's intolerant, our culture say, to preach Christ is the only way.

It doesn't matter if it's true, just intolerant. I think, too, there's a prevailing narrative in our culture that, and in many cultures, especially in the West, that some other cause is more important. Right? As if the culture would say to the church, the world doesn't need your religious message, it needs your activism or something else. Right? And that's not to say that activism is wrong or that the church has no responsibility to advocate for the downtrodden.

But, friends, we have the solution for death. To put that on the back burner for something else would be like finding the cure for cancer and deciding to put that on the back burner and sell ice cream instead.

[30:07] Ice cream is great. I love it. I'm glad that it's in this world. But, like, if you have the cure for cancer, let me know, okay? Right? And so, the authorities of this world would say to us, like, don't share the gospel.

It's impolite. It's intolerant. Other things are more important. And I think that we also stand against ourselves in this quest for boldness.

We tell ourselves things that would keep us from sharing the gospel, don't we? We say to ourselves, oh, it'll be awkward. We say to ourselves, I might not know what to say.

We say to ourselves, I might be rejected. This might ruin a relationship. In other words, we're afraid for all sorts of reasons.

And I wonder if Peter's example in 19, what does it do to us when you look at it and when you consider it? Does it steal you?

[31:19] Does it stiffen your spine? Or does it sort of confront and condemn you? Does it discourage you? Right? It's cool to see him stand there in boldness saying, you listen to yourselves, we'll listen to God.

In the face of the very people who got Jesus crucified. That's an incredible scene. At first we might say, yeah, you go, Peter. Right?

But then we look at ourselves. We don't measure up. We see Peter's boldness and immediately sense our own timidity.

We see his certainty and are discouraged by our own doubt. Peter is fearless and we are fearful. Peter is sold out and we sort of hedge our bets. Peter goes out of his way to add more to this conversation about Jesus. He didn't need to say all this.

[32:24] He went out of his way to say more about Jesus than he had to and we often do the opposite, don't we? And so this passage may, as we reflect on it, leave us discouraged.

And perhaps this passage does need to confront and to challenge us. In fact, I think it does. To consider our ways. To consider if we really believe people need salvation.

To consider if we really believe Jesus is the only means of salvation. And to consider whether we truly love our neighbor enough to offer them eternal life.

Eternal life with God. And so let this passage and Peter's boldness challenge you and then let it empower and free you.

Here's what I mean. I don't think the Holy Spirit led Luke to include this episode from the early church to discourage us.

[33:32] I think he did it to set us free. Who today follows Annas and Caiaphas and John and Alexander's the Sadducees.

I had to explain to you who they were. They're nobodies. The most powerful people in that city. The ones who could sway even the Roman government. The might of the greatest empire of the world. The mightiest people there were nobodies in the grand scheme of things.

Our culture that stands over us and kind of presses us against evangelism that seems so oppressive, so strong.

America and its culture and everything about it is going to be a forgotten footnote in the histories of heaven 10 billion years from now.

[34:57] Right? In the grand scheme of things. In the grand scheme of things, Annas and Caiaphas and John and Alexander are likely more influential in world history in the long run than the culture which now tells us that sharing Jesus is impolite and intolerant and not the point.

And what we fear most, just interpersonally when we share the gospel, it's probably the awkwardness, the possibility of rejection.

But this passage reframes that, I think, right? He's like, I'm not mostly concerned with what you think of me. I'm mostly concerned with God and I know what he thinks of me.

He sent his son for me. I love how one writer put it, if you have the smile of God, what does it matter if you have the frown of men? If the God who made the galaxies loves you so much that he went to the cross for you, you need not worry whether the conversation that you're about to have is going to be awkward.

Their opinion cannot harm you. For in Christ you can't even really die, friends. Don't fear awkwardness if you don't have to fear death.

[36:40] Friends, if you're rejected when you share the gospel, saints, he is going to robe you in the glory and splendors of heaven.

The greatest scorn that this world can muster is but a speck to be brushed off of the brilliant robes he will place on you on that day.

do not worry about a negative response if someone thinks less of you for sharing the gospel because God thinks so highly of you, you are so beloved by him that God so loved the world, loved you and me.

God so loved that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. And at the end of the day, what happens?

Peter doesn't have to listen to the opinions of men. He simply has to proclaim what God has told him. That's why he listened to God rather than men. God is higher and God is better and God's smile endures forever.

[37:58] Forever. And friends, in Christ we have the smile. God. And no frown of this world can undo that.

And so at the end of the day, our culture and our fears and everything that would stop us and prevent us and hinder us from sharing the message of Jesus Christ is in exactly the same boat as the ruling council was in verse 14 where it says, seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

the things that would cause us fear will, when viewed from heaven, have nothing to say, have nothing to say.

so friends, there is no other night under heaven by which we must be saved, and it is precisely because of that that we need not fear.

Let's pray. O Lord, would you embolden us to share the love of Christ, knowing that we have the love of Christ.

[39:46] And Lord, we ask for revival in our community, would you use us to do the work through which you will work. Lord, we pray for missionaries across the globe, that you would work mightily through them and bring many to glory in Christ.

And we ask, Lord, that you would be glorified, that you would be glorified in us and in all the saints, all who are redeemed.

And Christ who has become, even though he was scorned, has become the chief cornerstone upon which we build our faith and our life forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen.