

Speak openly and boldly about Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 April 2024

Preacher: Chris Lowe

[0 : 0 0] Kimo, thank you. A question as we begin with this passage open in front of us. I wonder! if you ever feel shy or scared? I wonder if you ever feel shy or even scared to speak openly! and boldly about Jesus. We don't live in Eritrea where some Christians have been imprisoned for over 10 years with periods of solitary confinement in metal shipping containers simply because they say that Jesus is Lord. We don't live there. We aren't in Saudi Arabia where it's illegal to speak about Jesus Christ with a Muslim and woe to you if you do. And yet here in our bit of the world my guess is that many of us may sometimes feel shy or nervous to speak openly about Jesus.

Partly because we fear what might happen. I might be completely off beam here but think of your family. Maybe your wider family is so precious to you and family relationships are fragile but okay. Most families fall into a way of relating together that keeps the peace. There's topics you talk about, there's stuff you avoid and you fear.

You know in fact that were you to start talking a bit more about Jesus they wouldn't like it. It would be uncomfortable. The shake of the head, the rolling of the eyes at you and at some point a comment. You're causing trouble with all that religious stuff. Stop it! And to be honest you don't want it to be like that in your wider family so you stay quiet. Or think of your school or neighbours or friends. You want to be liked. You don't want to stand out as the weird one. You want to fit in and you reckon that were you to start mentioning anything about being saved through Jesus they'd run away from you.

And you're scared of that. So you say nothing. Or think of the workplace. Of course you must not mention Jesus there. What would they think? And you've got to be so careful about what you post on social media because were you to say that Jesus is Lord and what he says is right you think well maybe they've come for me.

For sure Christians might speak boldly about Jesus amongst ourselves and maybe inside the four walls of your flat talk about Jesus feels okay. But I wonder if, like me, might it be that outside your front door, in the world, if you're a Christian believer here this morning, you sometimes feel a bit scared to speak boldly about Jesus. Because you fear they'll hate it or they'll hate you or hurt you or at the very least not like you very much. Well we've just heard read Acts chapter 4 and it's maybe seven weeks-ish after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Before ascending into heaven, back in chapter 1 verse 8, I should have put this on the screen I forgot. In chapter 1 verse 8 of Acts, Jesus promised his followers, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Did you know this? God's plan for right now today in human history. In fact, God's plan from the ascension of Jesus through to his future return is for the good news of the salvation through Jesus to be spoken and proclaimed to the ends of the earth.

[3 : 5 1] That's God's plan for history now. In Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit comes on the early church and the wonders of God are declared to the nations and Peter speaks about Jesus and 3,000 people believe and receive salvation.

Acts chapter 3, if you were here last Sunday morning, records Peter's second public speech. He restores a lame beggar and Peter speaks very, very boldly about Jesus, proclaiming in him the resurrection of the dead.

And yet even as Peter speaks this good news, even as numbers turn and believe in Jesus, there are those who hate it and so they come for Peter and John. And pick up from the start of this morning's reading. In chapter 4, verse 3, they seized Peter and John and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. Here's the question, what next?

What next for the early Christian church with its leaders jailed? Is it time to stop speaking about Jesus? Is it time to be scared into silence?

The answer is no. What happens next in verses 5 to 31 that Kime read for us is brave, it's wonderful, it is Holy Spirit empowered and it's written for us today because we, like the early church here 2,000 years ago, instead of ever being scared into silence, we are meant to speak boldly about Jesus.

[5 : 30] In our families, at school, with neighbours and friends and work colleagues, as a church, rather than being quiet and worried and fearful, we are meant to speak openly and boldly about Jesus Christ.

And these events of chapter 4 are written to address the kind of fears that we have and to move us to be people who open our mouths and speak in our lives.

Follow along what happens with me. First thing to mention from verses 5 to 12, 12, speak boldly about Jesus, because only Jesus saves.

See what happens in these verses. We're diving back in. After the previous day's events, there's been a healing and a speech and Peter and John jailed. We arrive at the next day, verse 5, do you see, and there is a great gathering.

The rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest, was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest's family. That's an intimidating gang.

[6 : 39] That's the ruling class of Israel. That's the powerful ones. Who, by the way, condemned Jesus to be crucified. And, verse 7, they had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them.

By what power or what name did you do this? They're talking about the miracle of chapter 3. And, in fact, we'll see that the restored lame man is standing right there with them.

By what power or name did you do this, they demand. Can you imagine being there? Is there reason to be scared? I'd have thought so. Verse 8, then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them.

That is super important, by the way. We'll come back to it later. Do you think Peter just happens to be a brave man, full of his own courage? No, no, he's not. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them.

Rulers and elders of the people, if we're being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel.

[7 : 46] And now here comes some straight, talking boldness. Know this. There's no vagueness in their words.

No smoothing over of uncomfortable truth. Straightforward, clear words about Jesus. And that's because, verse 11, Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. That's who he is. In the ancient world, building a house or a temple, you need a cornerstone. You need a massive foundation stone on which and around which you build.

And without a cornerstone, the building falls to bits. Says Peter to the temple authorities, Jesus is the cornerstone. Jesus is the God-appointed cornerstone of all God's plans and purposes to build his kingdom and save the world.

Jesus is the one sent by God to die for our sins, to rescue us from the judgment of God. Jesus is the risen Messiah and reigning in heaven, Lord of all.

[9 : 08] Jesus is the one who will return in glory, raise the dead to judgment, and restore all things. And when God says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, he's talking about Jesus, his son, the cornerstone, whom the living God in his extraordinary love sent into our world to live and die and rise and reign and return as our saviour.

And that is why, before this gathering, scary though it surely is, Peter is compelled. He is compelled to speak boldly about Jesus because, verse 12, here's the heart of it, salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given by God to mankind by which we must be saved.

Do you know this verse? The negatives are very strong here. Do you see in the verse? Salvation in no one else.

There is no other name in all creation given by God through which we and all mankind can have our sins forgiven and be restored to friendship with God forever.

There is no other name. There's no other way back to God. There's no other way back to God. Only through Jesus, the one and only God-given saviour.

[10 : 44] First thing to say this morning, see Peter speaking boldly about Jesus because salvation is found in no one else. Only Jesus saves.

We live, don't we, in a very, very multi-truth and multi-belief society.

We live in a culture in which whatever you want to believe for yourself is fine as long as you believe in it and it's good. And so to imagine speaking boldly about Jesus and saying that only he is the way, the truth and the life.

That is, what do you think? It's incorrect. It's intolerant. It's morally wrong. It's bad. And if you do say Jesus is Lord, come to him, turn to him and be saved, people may not like it.

And atheists, gentle Church of England, Sikhs, spiritual dabblers will be offended. And maybe your family and your friends and your colleagues too, are you saying we're not okay?

[12 : 04] We're not saved? Speaking openly and publicly about the Lord Jesus Christ in our society today may be considered hateful, except it's not.

Is it? Speaking boldly about Jesus actually is the most loving thing to do, surely.

If I have in my hand the one and only medicine that can heal and save a diseased world, what do I do?

I must speak. It's here. It's for you. Out of love, come, take this. Take this. Jesus is the only medicine.

He's the only restorer. He's the only saviour. Only Jesus rescues people from God's judgment and restores people to God's favour.

[13 : 08] And so people desperately need to hear about him. That they might turn and themselves be saved. Could you imagine, this is out of our experience, but to stand, can I say this?

To stand in the grand mosque of Mecca, if you could, and to proclaim boldly that there is no salvation through Islam, but that through Jesus your sins may be wiped out.

Were you to do that, then that you'd last long in this life. But it would be an act of the deepest love towards those who need to hear of him, wouldn't it?

Or to take it down 15 notches, just to talk one day with an unbelieving family member, a brother or a sister in your family. Bro, I love you.

Can I share with you what I've discovered about Jesus? Even if you fear your brother would hate it and you're scared it might mess up your relationship a bit, you must speak, mustn't you?

[14 : 16] Because Jesus is your brother's only hope, now and into eternity. This is Acts 4 in Jerusalem and Peter before the Jewish authorities.

Speak boldly about Jesus. Because only Jesus saves. Secondly, verses 13 to 1. Speak boldly about Jesus. This is very straightforward.

Because God tells us to. Look what happens next over the page in verse 13. Peter having spoken.

When they, that's the gathered leaders, the big gang, when they saw the courage of Peter and John, the word is boldness, they are brave and open.

When they saw their courage and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished. They took note that these men had been with Jesus, but since they could see the man who'd been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

And so, verse 15, they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin, they got them outside, and then they conferred together. What are we going to do with these men? They asked. Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they've performed a notable sign.

[15 : 26] We can't deny it. But to stop this Jesus thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name. We won't have it. As if it's possible to stop the irresistible spread of the good news of Jesus.

And so then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Okay, here's a second moment. What do you do when they command you to stop speaking?

We've put up with your school, Christian Union, for long enough. Now you must stop. The family's had enough of your Jesus talk.

Let's agree to know more of it. Please stay in your little church by yourself and believe what you want, but you must not speak publicly. We won't have it. Well, listen to this.

Speaking to the rulers and elders of Israel, the big powerful ones, Peter and John replied, verse 19, Which is right in God's eyes? To listen to you or to him?

[16:31] You be the judges. Which is very, very bold, isn't it? A kind of holy boldness. A seeing things as they are.

Boldness. We live our lives before the face of God. They say, does God want us to listen to you, powerful-looking rulers and elders in front of us and stop talking about Jesus?

Or does God want us to listen to him and so speak? Which puts the choice very starkly and clearly. And as for Peter and John then, so for Christian believers today, following the apostles.

You and I live our every waking moment before the face of God. His eyes are on us. Who is it right to listen to? Him? Or the voices around that say, shush, no more about Jesus, please?

It is right to listen to God. It is right to listen to the one who says that the good news of Jesus Christ should spread by word of mouth to the ends of the earth, isn't it?

[17:44] So don't be scared of the voices around you telling you to be quiet. Don't fear them. Don't worry about what your neighbours think of you. Don't fear that they'll look down on you a little bit.

Don't listen to that. Obey your God. It is right to do what he says. It's not just right. Actually, it's incredibly freeing, actually.

Don't you think? Lord, you have spoken. You've told us what to do. We'll obey you. We'll please you. We'll love you. And that's everything to us.

And we don't mind about the rest. So Peter and John say, which is right in God's eyes to listen to you or to him. You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we've seen and heard.

Of course. Which renders the Jewish rulers and elders pretty toothless, really. Because verse 21, after further threats, we really mean it, you really must stop.

[18:51] They let them go. Couldn't decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened because the man who was miraculously healed was over 40 years old, which is very old and it's a real miracle.

So that's where we're up to, verse 21. I asked at the beginning the genuine question for me and for us. I do wonder if you ever feel a bit shy or scared.

Whether you ever feel a bit nervous to speak openly and boldly about Jesus in your family, at school, with neighbours and friends and colleagues. You fear how they might respond.

You're tempted to be quiet. So here, in this brave and stunning moment, do you see the apostles speaking so boldly about Jesus?

Because salvation is found in no one else. He is the one and only saviour. Because it's right to listen to and obey the God who says, spread this good news.

[19:57] Well, we're almost done this morning. Say we get all that so far. Say we read this. Well, if you're not a Christian believer yet this morning, hear that he really is the saviour you need and turn to him, come to him, run to him.

If you are a Christian believer and you read this, maybe you think, I'd love to be like Peter and John. Love to be just a little bit braver. And yet you know yourself.

You know how weak you are and how scared you can be even sometimes to mention Jesus' name. You mention Jesus' name less than the kid in the playground who goes, Jesus.

This is me sometimes, to be honest. In some situations, not here with you, but in some situations, sometimes so scared of people hating me, or not really of hurting me, or just not liking me very much.

And it becomes a habit to actually be really quiet about Jesus. And if you're like me, genuinely, you might wonder to yourself, how could I ever change?

[21:11] How could I ever come just a little bit more open and bold? Because I'd love to be. We'll come to verses 23 to 31, finally.

And see that, as in the early church, so today, the power to speak about Jesus does not come from us, but is given wonderfully by God himself.

Speak boldly about Jesus, because only Jesus saves, because God tells us to. Speak boldly about Jesus, finally, praying for the sovereign Lord's help.

Look what happens. On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. Now, when all the believers heard this, they stood up tall and said, we're going to get...

No. They raised their voices together in prayer to God. That's what you do. Middle of verse 24, Sovereign Lord, they said.

[22 : 17] That's who we pray to. The sovereign, unchallengeable, all-powerful ruler of all, our Father. Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our Father David. Why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one, the Messiah.

Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided before should happen.

This raging and plotting, this gathering together against your servant, Jesus, all of it was within your plan, sovereign Lord. and now they're threatening us and they're telling us to speak no longer and so, we pray to you for help.

Verse 29, now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. That's the prayer. Give to your servants to speak your word with boldness.

[23 : 30] That is to be empowered in your life to speak about Jesus. It's a gift from God. He must work in us, put his Holy Spirit power in us to help us be bold witnesses for him.

They pray on, stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. I wonder if, like me, you do feel weak. Do you feel tongue-tied sometimes?

Not quite sure what to say about your Christian faith or when. Do you feel scared and not able to speak about Jesus? Well, what a church prayer meeting this is.

Praying for the sovereign Lord's enabling. Because you just see what happens? Verse 31, after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken because God was present in power and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, not just the apostles but all of them, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God boldly.

And it's because under God they prayed back then and it's because God worked in them and filled them with the Holy Spirit, it's because of that that people back then 2,000 years ago heard the message of salvation and they believed and the early church grew and spread and 2,000 years later here we are today.

[25 : 10] And we've got our annual church meeting coming up in 10 days time. What could we do together as a church over this coming year? Well we could pray, we could pray that God would fill us with the Holy Spirit and move us more and more to believe in Jesus and so obey him and know him that we speak the word of God boldly.

We could help one another more and more, could encourage one another, we could pray together for obvious opportunities with our friends and neighbours.

We could share how conversations were when I mentioned the name of Jesus and he said this and I wasn't sure what to say. We could work out together how to speak about Jesus to people who have done away with God in what they say they believe, all of that.

We could pray, we can work together, we must speak. We must be those who with the one medicine, the only salvation.

We must be those if we've taken the medicine ourselves who speak because salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given by God to mankind by which we must be saved.

[26 : 37] Let me lead us in a prayer and then we're going to sing together. Amen. Almighty God, thank you that salvation through Jesus is no fairy tale.

He came, he lived, he died, he rose, he ascended into heaven and he rules. Jesus Christ is Lord and he is the saviour.

and you say and the apostles say here that salvation is found in no one else and your great plan now is that by the power of the Holy Spirit we go out into the world and speak that mankind might be saved.

Please help us as a church to have Jesus as our own saviour and our knowing that only Jesus saves and knowing what you say please fill us and empower us and help us and make us those who are open and bold and brave and loving and speak about Jesus Christ because we love you and we obey you our God and we pray that over this coming year you might work through us and

there would be many many who find the forgiveness and restoration offered through Christ we pray
in Jesus name Amen