

Acts 4: 1-12 sermon

Got a question for you. What if your favorite preacher got arrested for speaking about Jesus? Yeah, really. A long time ago, there were these two visiting preachers speaking the name of Jesus and his resurrection in the church, and they preached so forcefully, and gathered such a crowd as to attract the authorities and police. Before they were hauled away, they had already healed a man and saw many non-believers believe in Christ.

Of course, I'm referring to Peter and John in Acts chapter 3 and 4.

From the Mirriam Webster dictionary comes the definition of the word *Chutzpah*: Some speakers of Yiddish feel that *chutzpah* has been diluted in English use, no longer properly conveying the monumental nature of the gall that is implied. A classic example can be found in Leo Rosten's 1968 book *The Joys of Yiddish*, which defines *chutzpah* as "that quality enshrined in a man who, having killed his mother and father, throws himself on the mercy of the court because he is an orphan."

Peter and John were speaking with Chutzpah. They had a supreme arrogance to go into the temple, the most important synagogue in the world, and start teaching about Jesus. Notice that they were not speaking against Judaism, they were talking about Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, as prophesied about throughout the old testament. They were teaching about Jesus being crucified and resurrected.

Throughout the bible there are a few instances of people being raised from the dead. They were brought back from death, resurrected to their previous life. Even so, they went on with their life and eventually died. Jesus was killed, rose from the dead, then ascended into heaven right in front of them.

There is a comedian who says about getting arrested: I had the right to remain silent, but I did not have the ability!

John and Peter could not remain silent. They had seen Jesus do amazing things, and were given the command to go out and do the same and even more. They showed up at the temple and healed a man that everyone knew was lame, then they started teaching, gathering a crowd of probably hundreds of men that were listening. The temple guards caught wind of what was going on and, along with the priests and elders, confronted Peter and John.

Please stand with me as we read today's passage of scripture, found in Acts, chapter 4 and verses 1-12.

4 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵The next day the rulers, the elders and Sadducees and the teachers of the law, met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are 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, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”^[a]

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

I notice right away that the priests and temple guard interrupt Peter and John. That had to be awkward.

What were they preaching that upset the established leadership so badly?

Acts 3: ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.”^[b] ²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

They were teaching Jesus crucified and raised from the dead. That is controversial today and was 2000 years ago too. Back then, the average man had a firm understanding of scriptures, taught in the synagogue since they were little boys. They knew the prophecies, and probably had heard of Jesus. Gossip, scuttlebutt, tales told by their friends and neighbors.

Chutzpah! Peter and John were right there in the temple, telling the stories they knew to be true. Probably speaking in voices that filled the area where they were, relating what they had seen with their own eyes, explaining the

scriptures and how they related to Christ's life, death and resurrection. The crowd would have been silent, listening intently to what these men were saying. They believed what they heard, it all made sense, and went along with everything they had been taught right here in this very building.

Oh, I would have loved to be there!

Let's break this story down:

Verses 1 and 2

4 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Priests: we know who they are. They are the Levites. The tribe of Levi was responsible for providing their sons to be priests. They are referred to as coming from the tribe of Levi.

I had a room mate in college. Stephan Cohen. Stephan was from New York, was raised as a Hassidic Jew, and converted to Christianity because of his study of the Old Testament scriptures. He was always quick to remind us that he was from the tribe of Levi!

The priests ran the temple and spent their time ministering to the people. They were working with the Romans to squash rebellion and keep Rome from utterly destroying Jerusalem and the Jewish people. The high priest was the head of the Sanhedrin, and as such was the director of Jewish education and politics. Priests also worked as Judges on a small scale. Remember, it was the Sanhedrin that convicted Jesus of blasphemy!

The Temple Guards maintained order in the temple, as directed by the priests. They probably wore somekind of uniform that would show their status and rank. Sometimes that had to go into the streets to work to maintain the peace and deal with situations the priests directed them to deal with.

Those two we are used to, but who are the Sadducees.

During the time of Christ and the New Testament era, the Sadducees were a religious-political group that held a great deal of power among the Jews in Israel. The Sadducees confronted Jesus on occasion, attempting to trip Him up, and they later opposed the preaching of the apostles.

The Sadducees were an aristocratic class connected with everything going on in the temple in Jerusalem. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priests and high priest, and they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin.

The Sadducees taught that God was not involved in your daily life. They denied any references to being raised from the dead. They denied any afterlife – believing that you ended when you died. They denied the existence of spiritual beings, i.e. demons and angels.

Because the Sadducees were basically a political party rather than a religious group, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid that He might bring unwanted Roman attention.

Going on: In Acts 4: 3-7 Peter and John were arrested, but the faith in Jesus was exploding. In just a few days, followers of Christ had numbered 120 to about 5 thousand. They were arrested in the afternoon, so were then

held overnight and brought before a group of rulers, elders, Sadducees and teachers of the law the next morning.

Boy did they open a can of worms! One of their first questions was: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

Talk about a set up! Peter and John must have been shocked that they had another opportunity to speak about Christ.

Verse 8 says Peter was filled with the Spirit. I don’t think Peter could have spoke so briefly and powerfully on his own.

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are 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, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”^[a]

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Well, they asked for an explanation, didn’t they? Wow! Peter and John knew the consequences, these same people had Jesus crucified. They were in real danger of being killed. I don’t know what the Rulers and Elders were hoping to hear, but I’m sure this was not the answer they were looking for!

If you were challenged, would you answer this way? No big theology lesson here. They spoke of what they had seen, done, and what they knew to be true. No sugar coating, no whitewashing, no “Oh, I can’t say that, I’ll offend someone.”

Just, yup, we done did what you heard we did. We raised up a lame man so he can walk again, and hey y’all, He’s standing right over there where you can see him. Now to answer your question, We did this in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – that same Jesus of Nazareth, who YOU CRUCIFIED!

These men had been with Jesus three years. They knew Him. They loved him, revered him, and knew him to be the Son Of God, as had been taught throughout the Old Testament. They were simple men, except for Matthew they had only the teaching they were taught in the temple. They didn’t have big fancy words, they just know what they knew. So, they not only said that the Rulers and Elders had crucified Jesus, but that God has raised Jesus from the Dead!

That’s why you can see this man raised from his mat, this is why he is standing before you today. That was a huge slap in the face to those very Rulers and Elders. Peter went on to challenge them further though.

They quoted from the Psalms, chapter 118:22

²²The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

Is it ok to take a minute and look at this Psalm? This is the Old Testament proof that Peter and John were giving to all their actions.

Let’s look at Psalm 118, verses 15-24

Shouts of joy and victory

resound in the tents of the righteous:

“The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!

¹⁶ The Lord’s right hand is lifted high;

the Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!”

¹⁷ I will not die but live,

and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

¹⁸ The Lord has chastened me severely,

but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;

I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord

through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;

you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

²³ the Lord has done this,

and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The Lord has done it this very day;

let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ Lord, save us!

Lord, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.^[b]

²⁷ The Lord is God,

and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession
up^[c] to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

Everyone in the room knew that entire Psalm, just from the one short verse. Kind of like if I did a movie quote you all recognized you would know the entire story from one quote. Don't think so?

I think everyone would recognize the movie if I said "Luke, I am your father"

Everyone who has kids will know this one: "My name is Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, prepare to die."

If you don't recognize that, how about: "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore."

Everyone in the room knew that scripture was talking about the Messiah, and here Peter and John just threw it in their face. You are the murderers who tried to kill the Messiah. You are the ones who tortured Him and crucified Him. Now he is raised from the dead, and is lifted up to the right hand of the Father, and is the cornerstone of our belief.

You all know what a cornerstone is? It is the foundation. Often a stone much larger than the others, inscribed with the name of the building and put there with a great celebration.

Peter was saying that Jesus was the cornerstone. He was the very rock that their beliefs were built on. They did not tear down Judaism. Indeed, they were saying that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the very person they had been waiting for for thousands of years.

Then he said:

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Can you imagine the electricity in the air when these words were spoken? Everyone talking at once, some wanting to worship Jesus, others wanting to kill Peter and John.

Where did Peter get the authority to speak such words? He wasn't a ruler, or elder, or member of the ruling family. He had not gotten anyone's permission to heal, or speak or ... or Anything! Peter's authority came from God himself, through the Holy Spirit. His choice of words was influenced by the Holy Spirit, and he spoke with Power.

Let's take a look at the scripture again after learning a little about it.

⁴ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas,

John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

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Application

Folks, Jesus is the cornerstone, the basis for our belief, and as Peter told those in power, in Acts 4:12

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

That message needs to be proclaimed in our heart, in our circle of friends and business associates and then to all of Las Cruces and New Mexico, to Texas, Arizona and Colorado and then to the whole country, then to all of North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia.

I work for a company that has a policy of intentional diversity, hiring people of all types, religions and personalities, thinking it will make the company stronger. It works, but it also gives me a platform. I can pray for people and let them know I am praying for them. I can share what God is doing in my life, and can encourage other Christians in their walk and encourage others to join me. Now, I'm not a bull in a china shop. If the Holy Spirit leads me that way, I will preach it at work, but since God has not called that, I don't go preaching, but rather I go representing. Peter and John started out by representing. They healed the lame man, then began answering the questions and sharing what they had seen and knew to be true. When questioned they answered with what they knew to be true. This man was healed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. They made the statement that these leaders had crucified Jesus, but that God had raised Him from the dead. It was the power Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, that healed this man.

Then comes the most beautiful, easy to understand statement in Acts 4:12

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

The Jewish leaders were confused by what had happened. That Peter and John were teaching in the courtyard was beyond doubt. And, the healing of the lame man was also without doubt. The leaders were confused and concerned. They didn't know what to do. They were trying to stop the preaching in Jesus name, but instead the Apostles could not be quiet, they were out speaking and healing, led by the Holy Spirit and with POWER.

The question the leaders asked is the same question the world asks today. Just as the religious leaders did not know how to respond, so the world

does not know how to respond. When a Christian attempts to live biblically, he stands out. When a believer attempts to live with high moral standards in honesty and integrity, in purity and holiness, refusing to engage in any activity or conversation which would violate the principles of God's Word or hamper His testimony, this kind of person cuts across the grain of secular society. And what does the world do?

I believe the tactics of the world are quite predictable. The first thing they do is try to ignore us. They simply act like we're not there. If they can't ignore us, their next strategy is to belittle us, or at least belittle our faith. If belittling doesn't work, they seek to intimidate and threaten. They try to use their power or position to control and manipulate us into giving our Christianity a little lower profile. This is how they attempt to answer the question, "What shall we do with these Christians?" In our text, we find the religious leaders deciding on a plan of intimidation, they try to intimidate Peter and John by arresting them.

Our enemy, Satan, uses the process of developing fear to come against us and to keep us from fully following Jesus. This process is called intimidation. To "intimidate" is defined as "to make timid or fearful." And intimidation is a strategy of Satan by which he attempts to control people. The people in the world who do not know Christ, seek to control Christians through intimidation. As we attempt to live out biblical Christianity in a secular society, we will come face to face with intimidation. The real question is what we will do when we face intimidation. Will we yield to fear, or will we find a way to overcome it.

Being bold about our faith is not an easy task! As I look back over my life, I see many opportunities where I could have been bold in the Spirit, but

often failed to take those opportunities. I was not intimidated all the time. Sometimes I spoke up. How about you? I ask each of you this morning, “Are you bold for Jesus Christ?” Do you stand before those who do not believe and tell them what Jesus means to you?” Many of us seem to face a major crisis every time we feel we should take a stand or share our faith with others. Perhaps it means not going with our friends. Perhaps it means telling those that we go to school with why you attend church rather than go to a conflicting school activity. Perhaps it means sharing God’s love with the neighbor next door.

To be bold does not mean to be arrogant and insensitive. It means taking a stand based on our relationship with Jesus and then letting people know why we took our stand. Letting people know that we are serious about our faith. That we have a deep desire to follow and obey Jesus.

Most of us have two obstacles within us which can prevent us from being bold about our faith. 1) The love of human affection and praise and 2), The love of comfort and security. Paul speaks to us on these issues in 1 Thess 2: 4-6.

⁴On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.

In Acts 3 the numbers grew to about 3000 men. Acts 4:4 says

⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

Now, that was a problem for the Jewish leaders.

Peter was quoting from Psalms about the cornerstone. There was a huge stone in the temple that was the cornerstone. The story goes that when the cornerstone was finished and brought to the temple construction site, it was so big and in the way that the foremen did not know what to do with it. They rejected it and pushed it over the edge. They tried to get it out of the way. When they realized what they had done, and had to go fetch it, where with an almost superhuman effort they got the cornerstone back up onto the Temple Mount where it could be installed properly.

These leaders knew the story, Peter didn't need to explain. Jesus is that cornerstone upon which all the Prophets had spoken, and then he followed with the statement that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ. Bold, effective, and life changing.

Ending

Wow!

Are you ready to represent!

If questioned, will you answer honestly to what you have seen and experienced?

Are you willing to have the Holy Spirit move through you.

Let's Pray

Lord, I want to be filled with your spirit, but I am afraid of what that means.

I want to be bold, but I am shy.

I want to blurt out that Jesus is the Messiah, the coming King, who will save us from all unrighteousness.

I don't feel adequate.

I am willing to be your servant though.

I want to be filled with your Holy Spirit.

I am willing to tell my schoolmates that I believe. Holy Spirit, lead my words.

I am willing to tell my friends and co-workers what I know to be true. Holy Spirit, lead my words.

I am willing to become what God has for me, and let the Holy Spirit lead.

I don't want to be rebellious or weak.

God I turn to you, Jesus I turn to you, and I ask for a complete infilling of your Holy Spirit so that I can be what you need.

Amen