

Holy Spirit Boldness for Preaching
 Acts 4:1-22
 Michael Felkins
 Grand Avenue Baptist Church
 Ames, Iowa
 July 25, 2021

I didn't go to college right after high school. I had been working for my uncle James since about my sophomore year of high school. My uncle James owned a truck shop that repaired semi-trucks. My cousin, Steve, was his head mechanic, and he had been teaching me to be a mechanic.

After I graduated, I went to work for my Uncle James with Steve as my teacher. At first, Steve would tell me how to do it. Then, I would watch him, and then he would watch me do it and mess up, and eventually, I was able to do the work. I started small until I could eventually take one of those huge Cummins engines apart and put it back together.

But here is the thing. I didn't learn how to do that overnight. I didn't even learn how to do that by Steve telling me how to do it. It took a couple of years, but eventually, I became a decent mechanic. I became a good mechanic because I spent time with Steve. He told me what to do, showed me how to do it, let me help him, and then he turned me loose to do it on my own.

This is kind of what we see in Acts 4:1-22. We see Peter and John, two men whose only religious training consists of being with Jesus. Look in v. 13:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

Verse 13 is the heart of this text. They were bold because they had been disciplined by Jesus for three years, and now they were filled with the Holy Spirit. All that Jesus had taught Peter and John was suddenly empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

So, when Jesus turned them loose on the world, they were confident, bold gospel witnesses. They were not simply filled with head knowledge, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and it made them bold.

The main point of Acts 4:1-22 is: The Holy Spirit fills us with boldness and confidence in the person and work of Jesus. As we work through Acts 4:1-22, I want you to notice three things.

I. The Spirit gives us confidence in God's plan of salvation (v. 12)

Look in v. 12:

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Verse 12 is a bold verse. It is a powerful verse. It is one of those "gospel in a nutshell" verses. It is a verse that many people memorize as a part of how they share the gospel with lost people. It is a coffee mug or T-shirt verse, isn't it?

Do you know what v. 12 is? It is the tip of the arrow of the gospel in Peter's first three sermons.

Verse 12 is the heart of all that Jesus had been teaching Peter and the other disciples the three years they were with Him. Verse 12 teaches us that Jesus is the only way anyone can be saved. It is one of those rare verses that sum up the message of all Scripture that teaches—it is all about Jesus.

Do you remember the story of Jesus meeting His disciples after His resurrection on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35? As they walked to Emmaus Jesus walked up and began walking with them, but they didn't know it was Him. They began talking about all that had happened to Jesus. Remember what He said to them,

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”

Then as He walked, He taught them that all of the Old Testament was about Him and the redemptive work He came to accomplish. In essence, He was teaching them that there is salvation in no other name but His name, the name of Jesus Christ.

So, when we look at Peter's first three sermons, they probably sound a lot like what Jesus taught His disciples on the road to Emmaus. He had walked the people through the Old Testament to show them that Jesus is the Messiah God promised to send and that there is salvation in no other name but Jesus Christ.

But notice in vv. 8-12 Peter gave this sermon to the religious elite of the day. He was standing before the Sanhedrin council, the temple priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees.

This is pretty amazing when you consider just three months earlier Peter had denied he knew Jesus to a young servant girl. Then, after Jesus had been crucified, he was afraid, so he and the other disciples hid. Peter was not certain Jesus would rise from the dead. Then when he was told Jesus had risen he had trouble believing it. Finally, when Jesus had risen from the dead, he was not sure about where he stood with the Lord because he had denied Jesus during Jesus' trial. He thought his time as a disciple was over, so he decided to leave the ministry and go back to fishing. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus came to Peter on the shores of Lake Galilee, and He restored Peter. Then Jesus commissioned him to go and feed His sheep.

Now Peter is boldly preaching a sermon to the Jewish leaders! First, he indicted the Jews and especially these Jewish leaders for killing Jesus. Then he declared that there is salvation in no other name than Jesus. In the previous sermon, he called them to repent of their wickedness and place their faith in the resurrected Savior for the forgiveness of their sins.

Peter did not mince words. He made sure they understood that salvation is only in the name of Jesus. Salvation could not be found in their sacrifices, their good works, their morality, and the fact that they were Jewish. Salvation was not be found in law-keeping. Salvation was not found in their Jewish traditions or anything else they may think will get them good standing with God.

Peter's words are very exclusive, and yet Peter was confident that Jesus is the only way to be saved. Peter was confident in God's plan of salvation. He was confident that God's word taught that all of Scripture was about Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, how confident are you in God's plan of salvation? Do you struggle to explain to others that Jesus is exclusively the only way to be saved? Do you feel like you need to apologize for God's word and Jesus? If this is you, then you need to grow in your knowledge of God's word and ask the Spirit of God to grow your confidence.

Perhaps your confidence is weak because you struggle to explain the gospel to others. Do you struggle to share the gospel? A good thing you might do to grow your confidence is to find a mature believer and work on learning how to share the gospel. Practice on one another. Pray for one another. Fill your heart and mind with knowledge of God's plan of salvation, and then ask the Spirit of God to set it on fire.

Before we move on from v. 12, I want to ask one more question of v. 12. I want to ask what some call "The R. C. Sproul question": "Saved from what?" When Peter said:

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Sproul taught that it is important to explain to lost people “from what they are being saved” and “to what they are being saved.”

Salvation does not simply mean being saved from a rotten life of getting drunk all the time and wrecking your life or being angry all the time, or winding up in prison. Salvation does not necessarily result in a better standard of living. These things might be some of the benefits of salvation, but not necessarily.

First, salvation means to be saved from the penalty and power of our sin against a holy God. If we miss the salvation Jesus offers us, then we will spend eternity in Hell under the wrath of God. In other words, we are saved from eternity in Hell under the wrath of God.

If this is what we are saved from, then to what are we saved? We are saved to do what we were originally created to do in the Garden of Eden. We are saved to know God, have a relationship with God, and spend eternity with Him in heaven.

But there is a problem. The fact that we are born sinners and that we have committed sins that have separated us from our Holy God. But God being rich in mercy decided to save those He created, so God took on human flesh in Jesus Christ. He left heaven and came to earth and lived the life that we should have lived and then died our death on the cross in order to pay for the sins of His people against Him. After He was killed on the cross, He rose from the dead, and now He calls all people to turn from their sin and look to Him in faith for salvation. Now all of those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by repenting of their sin and turning to Jesus in faith for salvation are saved.

There are many people who object to God’s plan to save mankind through the exclusivity of Christ alone. Why do they do this? It is because they begin in the wrong place. They look at themselves or other people. They compare themselves with others and believe they are better than most, and think that is good enough. They do not understand that God is holy, pure, righteous, and just. If they do happen to think about God, they focus on His grace, mercy, and compassion at the expense of justice, righteousness, and holiness.

When people start with themselves, they do not understand the depth of their problem. They do not understand the depth of their sin. They fail to grasp that the reason for their unhappiness and misery is because they are broken by sin. They fail to understand that the reason they do things they regret is because of their sin. They are unable to see that the reason there is so much misery and pain in the world is due to sin. Sin is the reason the world is broken. When people fail to understand sin then they fail to understand God’s plan for their salvation.

When people are unable to see the problem of their sin, they try to fix their broken lives and this broken world in their own efforts. They may do some good deeds for themselves or others. They may give help or sympathy or compassion to others. They may strive to be moral and live good lives and make new laws to force others to be moral, but none of those things fix anything or make them right with God. The problem is none of these efforts save anyone.

Here is the rub: to say that God’s plan of salvation is that sin is everyone’s problem and that Jesus is the only way to be saved from their sin is just too much for many people. It goes against their sin nature. Our sin nature tells us we can save ourselves, but we know deep down inside we cannot do it.

In the end, the words of the hymn by Augustus Toplady is the confession we all need to make:

*Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill the law's demands.
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone.
Thou must save and Thou alone.*

II. The Spirit gives us confidence for proclaiming God's word.

Verses 8-12 is Peter's third sermon in the few days since Pentecost. As was said earlier, only about 2-3 months earlier, Peter had denied Jesus at His trial because he feared a young servant girl. Now, he had concluded his third sermon, healed a crippled beggar, has been arrested for preaching the gospel, and stood with John before the Jewish religious leaders, calling them to repent of their sin of killing the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

What changed in this man? Quite simply, Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus discipled Peter for three years and taught him all he needed to know, and now the Holy Spirit had taken the biblical truth that had been poured into him by Jesus and set it on fire.

What do we learn from the boldness of Peter's preaching? Three things:

First, make the most of opportunities to share the gospel. Although Peter and John had been arrested and thrown in jail the very next morning, they did not cower in fear before the council but instead boldly proclaimed the gospel.

Most likely, Peter was standing in the place where Jesus had just a few months earlier and was near where he had denied Jesus, but Peter did not make the same mistake twice. This time he was clear about his love for Jesus and called out the Jewish leaders for killing Jesus.

Peter didn't wait for a better opportunity. He didn't think, "Well, we're in court, so I had better wait. This is a hostile environment, and there are too many people around. They might misunderstand my sermon." Peter made the most of his opportunity to share the gospel, and we must do the same.

Second, give a clear explanation of the gospel. Look at what Peter said to them in vv. 10-12:

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. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

He was clear about their sin. He laid the blame for Jesus' death at the feet of the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leaders. Then he spoke to the very words Jesus had spoken to them about the parable of the tenants in Luke 20:17-18 to show them that Jesus is the Cornerstone. Luke 20:17-18 says:

But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Peter concluded his gospel presentation, telling them that Jesus is the only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

We must be clear about the gospel we share. We must be clear about sin and about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be clear that all people are sinners and need a Savior. We must be clear that all people need to be saved by their faith in the work of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. We must be clear that eternity is at stake and that there are eternal consequences for rejecting the message of the gospel.

Now do not hear what I am not saying. I realize that there are times when you are talking with someone, and you do not have time to go through all of the gospel but can only, perhaps, tell some that Jesus loves them or that He died for their sin and rose from the dead. What I am saying is that at some point, someone must explain the full and simple message of the gospel to them.

Third: You don't have to be a professional to share the gospel—notice v. 13. Peter had just given his third sermon, and he and John stood before the religious professionals, and they were stunned. Look at v. 13 again:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

What is the key to boldly proclaiming or sharing the gospel? It is spending time with Jesus in God's word and prayer and being filled with the Holy Spirit. That is all that is necessary.

If you want to get some training or take a class or memorize verses and use an outline to help you share the gospel, that is good. Every little thing you learn helps you become a better witness for Christ.

However, it is when the Holy Spirit ignites your understanding of the gospel then you will begin to find ways to share the gospel. You may even do it in conversations by listening well and asking good questions.

One simple way to share the gospel is to do one-on-one Bible reading with another person. Just meet with someone who is not a Christian and begin reading the Bible. I think you will be amazed at how the Holy Spirit will use that relationship and God's word.

Finally, the third thing we see from Peter and John before the Jewish council is that the Holy Spirit gives us confidence when we face persecution.

III. The Spirit gives us confidence in the face of persecution.

Up to now, in the book of Acts, everything had been going well for the church. But after the healing of the crippled beggar, the church began to face persecution. What you will notice as you read Acts is that from this point on, persecution and tribulation are a regular part of church life.

Perhaps you are like me, and you have heard people say that they want to get back to early church life. What they are doing is romanticizing the early church. Usually, they are only thinking of the first three chapters of Acts because, after Acts 3, life for the church gets hard.

Yet, here in Acts 4, we have to wonder what Peter and John must have been thinking as they stood before the Jewish council. They may have been having flashbacks of just a few weeks earlier when Jesus stood where they stood. They saw Jesus go through a rigged trial, stripped naked, beaten with a cat-o-nine tail, and nailed to a cross. Most likely, they probably thought this was about to happen to them.

To make matters worse, remember just a few weeks earlier, most likely in the very place they were standing now, Peter denied Jesus to a young servant girl because he feared her and what might happen to him if the leaders and the crowd found out he was associated with Jesus.

However, Peter is not the same man he used to be. Now Peter and John are filled with the Holy Spirit. Now they face persecution with reckless abandon.

In v. 18, the Jewish council told them not to speak or teach or preach any longer in Jesus' name. These guys were hoping that this warning would resolve the issue, but it did not. Look in vv. 19-20 at Peter and John's reply:

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, ²⁰for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

Brothers and sisters, there may come a day when we may have to give Peter and John's reply when we are told not to speak, teach or preach in Jesus' name. We may have to go against our government authorities when it comes to preaching or proclaiming, or even sharing the gospel. Right now, we do not live in that world, but we have brothers and sisters in Christ who do live in that world.

In China right now, the government is cracking down on churches and Christians. Missionaries are being kicked out of the country. The church is having to go further and further underground in order to meet.

Yet, in spite of the persecution, people are still coming to faith in Christ. Like the early church, thousands are trusting Christ. The Chinese communist government cannot stop the gospel. They are simply the latest regime that is trying to stop Christ's church.

It is not like this for us in the U. S. yet, but that day will come, and when it does, we must remember the words of our Savior in Luke 21:12-15:

But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

Notice what Jesus says in this text. He says He will give us a mouth and wisdom. How will He do that? He will do that by His Holy Spirit. This is a promise from our Savior in which we can take rest.

Conclusion

Bottom line: The key to knowing what to say on that day is not memorizing some speech or rehearsing a response to an accusation. The key bold, confident proclamation of the gospel is found in Acts 4:13. So, when persecution comes, may the watching world say of us:

Now when they saw the boldness of the believers of Grand Avenue and perceived that they were just common people, they were astonished. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

Can a watching world look at your life and tell if you have been with Jesus?