

Acts 4:23-37 | When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?
²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

³² Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Acts 4:23-37 | Boldness and Unity

The young church faced their first formal resistance as the Sadducees and temple leaders arrested Peter and John and threatened them to no longer speak in the name of Jesus. Peter and John answered boldly against this initial resistance. When they return to their friends and share what happened at their trial, they turn to the Lord in prayer as a community, and they are all filled with the Holy Spirit, and then for the second time we receive a passage describing the church’s love for one another, and encouragement of one another. In the face of resistance they keep going and are built up into greater persistent unity. It is one thing to face resistance boldly, it is another glory to continue pursuing in the face of resistance. They are not put on defense but remain on offense.

1. Facing Resistance

Acts 4:23 | When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Right after Peter and John are released from custody they went to their friends to report to them what was commanded by the chief priests and the elders. They were prohibited to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. This is an extremely vulnerable moment for the apostles and for the unity of the church. To be friends with the apostles now bears an explicit cost. This is often when fracture comes.

Here is a likely response they could have received. Peter John that sounds like a tough situation. But you see now were all in a tough situation because you said you wouldn't stop speaking in Jesus name. People won't completely understand how these leaders are not really our adversaries they just have a different perspective on who Jesus is than we do. These are the leaders who have been placed over us and we need to respect them. I think it will send the wrong message if we are speaking out of step with these leaders, who we have so much agreement with on so many issues. If they witness our compliance they will understand that we are not mounting a revolt and will probably provide us the space to witness to them. Plus these are men who we want to see converted. We will lose a voice in their presence if they see us as adversaries.

Peter and John say, well I guess you're right. I don't want to ruin your ability to witness to people who still really respect the sadducees and temple leaders. Now in the name of witnessing the church has stopped witnessing. The reality is a denial of Jesus because of fear of opposition. That is what normally happens. We know this normally happens because this is what happened to Jesus. In fact Peter did it. When the stakes were high when Jesus was present he denied Jesus.

The advance of the gospel always faces resistance. The first work of the Holy Spirit was in Peter and John's ability to bear witness to Jesus in the face of this resistance. The second miracle of the Holy Spirit was the willingness of the church to maintain unity with the apostles and one another unflinching from the call of God in the face of opposition.

So the question is, how did they do that? How did they continue proclaiming the face of opposition.

1. First to the Lord

Acts 4:24 | And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

When they face opposition their first action is to turn the Lord in prayer. The other option which they might have done is analyzed their strategy to figure out how they could not

face opposition. Or they could ruminate on how cruel the opposition was that they faced. But they don't even allow themselves the chance to do that instead they turn to the Lord in prayer and acknowledge him as the sovereign Lord who is over all of creation. This is the starting point, what we have experienced is in the plan of God.

2. Then to the scriptures

Acts 4:25-26 | who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

The other option is to turn to the Lord and immediately consider the particulars of their own situation. Here is how I wish Peter said it. Or here is the real danger that were facing next week. They don't interpret their situation until they have turned to the light of the scriptures. So they turn to Psalm 2. Psalm 2 describes a situation like theirs. It allows the scripture to place the difficulty they're experiencing under the hand of God in a particular way. Without the light of the scriptures we will interpret by some other metric. You know this opposition is really destroying my peace. Or this opposition is really a tactical mistake. Well you can't say that when you look at scripture and it plainly shows this opposition is promised.

3. Assessing your experience in truth.

Acts 4:27-28 | for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

They see the reality of Psalm 2 fulfilled in the life of Jesus. They understand that the suffering they have experienced is exactly the same as that which Christ experienced. And they understand that the true nature of their opposition is those who are against Christ and those who are for him. They likely felt like they had no group on their side. In fact everyone seemed opposed to the proclamation of Christ. The Gentiles were in fact united with the Israelites, Herod and Pontius Pilate were united together to accomplish the murder of Christ. But they see that this was not outside of the plan of God. But more than it being not outside of God's plan it was God's very actions that is why Luke adds that it was God's hand which caused the crucifixion of Jesus.

As they assess the reality of Christ's story they are driven to conclude that God's hand was governing every part of it for a glory that they couldn't see on the front end. The most horrific action that has ever taken place which is the murder of Jesus, was under the providential hand of God for an unthinkable glory in the resurrection. This reframes how they might think of their situation. Because they are assessing scripture through the revelation of Jesus Christ they understand that their Story will look like his.

4. Pray for continuing in boldness

Acts 4:29-30 | And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Because they understand themselves as in Christ’s story under the hand and plan of God they do not pray to be taken out of Christ’s conflict. They in fact desire to hold fast to Christ, so they pray that they word speak Christ’s word with boldness. Because they understand God to be over all things they ask God to look upon the situation they are facing and to provide them with boldness necessary for the occasion. And they ask that God would go before them to continue doing the things that got them in this mess in the first place. They see themselves in Christ story, and they want Christ to keep pushing forward just as he called them to. They aren’t stopping! Praise God they didn’t!

5. Depend upon the Holy Spirit, don’t start looking to yourselves.

Acts 4:31 | And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Now they were given a remarkable sign. When they prayed the whole place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit to continue proclaiming the word of God with boldness. Now you likely won’t have the building your in shake. But you should know that theirs did. Why did the building shake? Why that sign? I think its because they are taking that great city Jerusalem using only they’re voices and entrusting themselves to God. This is exactly how Joshua took that great city Jericho. By shouting with their voices the city shook and the walls came down. They asked for the provision of the Holy Spirit and God provided. He will provide for you too.

6. Seek unity of mind in Christ with each other.

Acts 4:32-33 | Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

This is in one sense the fruit of their perseverance but it is also the fuel. You see the church did not shrink back from each other nor did they shrink back from the apostles teaching. They weren’t all proclaiming with the boldness of the apostles. They didn’t have the position, but they remained supportive of one another and in communion with he apostles and their teaching and therefore they were in true communion with each other.

7. Encouragement means sharing danger.

Acts 4:34-35 | There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Their share in risk in public meant they would share in risk for each others sake. This