



Boldness Before Power

Kicking It Off

What's something you love so much that you can't help but talk about it, even when no one asks?

Read

Acts 4:1-22

Summary

Peter and John got arrested for healing a guy who couldn't walk. The religious leaders surrounded them, trying to trap them into saying something they could use against them. It's intimidating, right? Seventy powerful guys circling two fishermen.

Peter didn't cower, and he didn't come out swinging either. He just told them straight up: we healed this man through Jesus, the same guy you killed, the same guy God raised from the dead. That's it. No clever arguments, no political strategy. Just the truth about Jesus.

Peter wasn't scared because he'd already seen how this story goes. The authorities did the exact same thing to Jesus, and they thought they won. But then God raised him from the dead. So when they tried the same intimidation tactics on Peter, he basically knew their weapons didn't work anymore.

The leaders couldn't deny the healing happened, and the crowd was praising God for it, so they just told Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus. And Peter's response is everything. He said, "We cannot help but speak about what we've seen and heard." Not "we won't," but "we can't." It wasn't rebellion for the sake of rebellion. Sharing Jesus had just become who he was.

That's the difference between doing something because you're supposed to and doing something because it's overflowing out of you. Peter had spent three years walking with Jesus every day. When the pressure came, he didn't have to think up the right answer. He just knew Jesus, and that was enough. When life puts pressure on your faith, you don't need all the answers. You just need to know the one who does, and spend enough time with him that talking about him becomes as natural as breathing.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. There's a difference between speaking about faith because you feel obligated and speaking because you genuinely can't help it. Which one describes your current experience with sharing your faith, and what do you think shapes that?
3. When facing opposition or uncomfortable situations, many people either avoid conflict entirely or respond with aggression. How do you typically respond when your beliefs are challenged, and what would Spirit-filled boldness look like in those moments?
4. Peter's confidence came not from having all the answers but from having spent three years walking daily with Jesus. What does your current rhythm of spending time with Jesus look like, and how has it shaped how you respond under pressure?
5. Peter said he "could not help but speak" about Jesus. What would need to change in your relationship with God for sharing him to feel less like an obligation and more like an overflow?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"When the church stands before the powers of this world, Spirit-filled boldness transforms trials into testimonies."

"The opposition is not an opportunity to overthrow the opposition. The opposition is an opportunity for you to share your testimony, to share what your God has done, not what you can do."

"Spreading the gospel is not something you should do. It's something you cannot help but do."

"Many times the reason you feel inadequate to respond is less about how well-versed you are in scripture and morality, and more about the fact that you haven't been spending enough time with Jesus."

Sermon Notes

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

5 On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 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. 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." 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. 14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 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." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 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, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 21 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. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

Outline

1. The Opposition that Confronts (vv. 1-7)
 - a. The Sanhedrin surrounds Peter and John to intimidate and entrap them
 - b. Luke draws a parallel to Jesus being arrested and questioned by the same council
 - c. The authorities question by what power or name the disciples healed the lame man
 - d. The church has grown to 5,000, causing concern among those in power
 - e. Opposition creates anxiety, but avoiding it causes greater weakness and atrophy
 - f. The proper response is neither cowering nor aggression, but Spirit-filled boldness
2. The Proclamation that Confounds (vv. 8-12)
 - a. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, responds with clarity and conviction
 - b. He declares the man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth
 - c. Peter confronts the Sanhedrin directly: "whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead"
 - d. Jesus is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22)
 - e. "There is salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (v. 12)
 - f. The Sanhedrin's crucifixion did not have final authority; God's verdict through resurrection overruled theirs
 - g. Peter and John were not intimidated because they had seen this story before and knew its ending
3. The Conviction that Cannot Be Silenced (vv. 13-22)
 - a. The Sanhedrin recognized Peter and John had been with Jesus, though they were uneducated men
 - b. Unable to deny the miracle and unwilling to provoke the crowd, they commanded silence
 - c. Peter responded: "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" (vv. 19-20)
 - d. This is not rebellion against authority but an overflow of conviction
 - e. The difference: not "we will not stop" but "we cannot stop"
 - f. Ministry flows from conviction, not duty or obligation
 - g. The world wants you to submit to its logic, values, and worldview
 - h. Christians are not driven by the mob or popular opinion but by adherence to Christ alone
 - i. Walking daily with Jesus, as Peter did for three years, prepares you to respond with boldness
 - j. The answer to the world's problems is not political solutions or human systems but Jesus alone

Notes

There is a scene in Acts chapter 3 that challenges nearly everything we assume about what the church is supposed to do in the world. Two of Jesus's closest followers, Peter and John, are walking to the temple for afternoon prayer when they encounter a man who has been lame since birth. He sits at the entrance to the temple, at a gate so magnificent it was called the Beautiful Gate, begging for money from the religious people passing through. The contrast is striking: a gate of precious bronze, more valuable than silver or gold, and at its base, a man who represents the very picture of human helplessness.

What happens next forms the foundation for understanding the church's true mission.

The man looks at Peter and John, expecting to receive a few coins. He has done this thousands of times before. Friends or family carry him to this spot every day so he can provide for himself through the generosity of those entering the temple to worship. He knows what to expect. But Peter does something unexpected. He stops. He looks directly at the man. He says, "Look at us."

This moment deserves attention. Peter does not walk past. He does not avert his eyes. He does not treat this man as part of the scenery, as invisible as the stones beneath their feet. There is dignity in this encounter, a recognition of personhood that precedes everything else. Peter meets the man at his level, eye to eye.

Then Peter says something that sounds almost cruel at first: "Silver and gold I do not have." The man's heart must have sunk. But Peter continues: "But what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

And the man does.

His feet and ankles, which had never supported his weight for a single moment in over forty years, suddenly grow strong. He does not just stand, he leaps. He does not just walk, he goes bounding into the temple, praising God. The people who had seen him begging for years are filled with wonder and amazement. They cannot deny what they are witnessing.

But here is where the story becomes more than a healing narrative. Here is where it becomes a lesson about what the church actually possesses and what it is called to offer the world.

When the crowds gather, astonished, Peter immediately redirects their attention. "Why do you stare at us as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?" Peter refuses to take credit. He refuses to let anyone think that he possesses some special ability or that his exceptional faithfulness earned this miracle. The power did not come from Peter. The power came through Peter, from Jesus.

This distinction matters enormously. Peter was not setting up shop as a miracle worker. He was not launching a healing ministry where people could line up and receive whatever they needed. He was acting as a channel for the authority of the risen Christ. The name of Jesus, not the name of Peter, held the power.

This is where the application becomes uncomfortable for the modern church. We live in a world that expects institutions to solve problems. We expect churches to function as engines of social welfare, to distribute resources, to meet material needs. And there is certainly a place for generosity and care for the poor. The early church in Acts 2 shared their possessions with one another. That is part of the picture.

But Peter and John did not invite this lame man to join their commune. They did not offer him a place in their sharing economy. They did not give him money to survive another day. They gave him Jesus. And in giving him Jesus, they gave him something money could never buy: the ability to walk into the temple and worship God.

The miracle was not primarily about restoring the use of his legs. It was about removing the barrier between this man and the presence of God. The healing enabled worship. The physical restoration pointed to a spiritual reality.

This is the church's unique gift. We do not have silver and gold in the way the world measures wealth. We do not have political power or institutional resources that can compete with governments and corporations. But we have the name of Jesus. And that name carries authority that no amount of money can purchase.

The prosperity gospel gets this exactly backward. It suggests that if we worship God faithfully enough, he will give us silver and gold. But Peter, one of the most faithful followers of Jesus who ever lived, had no silver and gold to give. The Holy Spirit certainly had the power to manifest wealth in Peter's hands. But that was not what this man needed. That was not what any of us truly need.

We need Jesus.

After the healing, Peter preaches to the gathered crowd. He does not soften his message. He tells them directly that they are the ones who handed Jesus over, who denied him before Pilate, who asked for a murderer to be released instead of the Holy and Righteous One. They killed the Author of life.

But Peter is not speaking from a position of superiority. This is the same Peter who denied Jesus three times on the night of his arrest. Peter knows what it means to reject Christ. He also knows what it means to be restored. Jesus met Peter after the resurrection and asked him three times, "Do you love me?" Three denials, three restorations. Peter speaks to the crowd as someone who has already received forgiveness for the very sin he is describing.

And so Peter offers hope. He acknowledges that they acted in ignorance. He explains that their actions actually fulfilled what God had foretold through the prophets, that the Christ would suffer. And then he issues a command, not a suggestion: Repent and turn back.

The reasons Peter gives for repentance are striking. First, your sins will be blotted out. Not covered, not overlooked, but erased completely, as if they never existed. Second, times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord. This word for refreshing appears only here in the New Testament. It pictures cool relief from oppressive heat, the revival of someone who is exhausted. Third, repentance prepares the way for Christ's return and the restoration of all things.

This is what the church offers. Not programs. Not resources. Not self-help strategies or political solutions. The church offers forgiveness, refreshing, and hope.

But there is also a warning. Peter quotes Moses: "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." There is urgency here. Repentance cannot be postponed indefinitely. God is constantly inviting people into his embrace, but he will not force anyone into his family.

The conversion rate was not one hundred percent. Some who witnessed this miracle walked away unchanged. Some probably wanted to follow Peter instead of Jesus, to find a guru who could solve their problems. They missed the point entirely.

The church gathers not because we are powerful or righteous. We gather because of Jesus. We believe that God loves us so much that he sent his Son to die for us. And our responsibility, in response, is to constantly repent, to constantly turn from our wicked ways. As we do this, God blots out our sins. He refreshes us. And we develop a longing to be with him forever.

In this healing and restoration, we are given the miraculous strength to praise God even when circumstances suggest we should not be able to. And this will cause people to wonder. Some will call us crazy. But others will say, "Tell me more. I want what you have."

And we will be able to say: I cannot give you the power to walk. I cannot give you the power to see. I cannot do these things. But I know a Jesus who can. And I believe he can turn your heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

Blog

The scene is almost cinematic. Two fishermen from Galilee stand in the center of a semicircle, surrounded by the most powerful religious leaders in Judaism. The Sanhedrin, seventy members along with the High Priest, has assembled in full force. Annas is there, the puppet master who controlled the high priesthood through his sons and son-in-law. Caiaphas is there too, the same man who presided over Jesus' trial just weeks earlier. The scribes, the elders, the ruling aristocracy have all gathered to deal with these followers of the executed Nazarene.

Peter and John have no lawyers, no political connections, no formal education in the rabbinic schools. By every measure that matters to this court, they are nobodies. And yet what happens next will reshape our understanding of what it means to witness for Christ in a hostile world.

This confrontation in Acts 4:1-22 marks the first direct clash between the early church and the religious establishment. It sets the pattern for everything that follows. The church will face opposition. The powers of this world will try to silence the gospel. And ordinary believers, filled with the Spirit, will display a boldness that confounds their accusers.

The trouble started the day before. Peter and John had gone to the temple at the hour of prayer and encountered a man who had been lame from birth. He was over forty years old and had spent his entire life begging at the temple gate. When he asked for money, Peter gave him something better. "Silver or gold I do not have," Peter said, "but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And the man did. He jumped to his feet, walked into the temple courts, and began leaping and praising God. A crowd gathered. Peter seized the moment to preach. He explained that this healing came through faith in Jesus, the one they had handed over to be killed, the one God raised from the dead. By the end of the day, the number of men who believed had grown to about five thousand.

This is what alarmed the authorities. Luke tells us they were "greatly disturbed" because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. The Greek word here (διαπνούμενοι) indicates visceral agitation, not mild annoyance. The Sadducees, who controlled the temple and rejected the doctrine of resurrection, found this particularly offensive. The apostles were not only teaching without authorization. They were validating the very doctrine the Sadducees denied, and they were doing it by pointing to Jesus as proof that resurrection actually happens. So they arrested Peter and John, held them overnight, and convened the Sanhedrin the next morning. The question they posed was a trap: "By what power or what name did you do this?" They wanted to know who authorized these men to teach. If Peter claimed his own

authority, he could be dismissed as a pretender. If he named Jesus, he could be charged with promoting a condemned criminal.

But Peter had been with Jesus. And the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now filled his witness.

Luke's description is precise: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them." This is not a new filling but the ongoing reality of Pentecost activated for this moment. Jesus had promised exactly this in Luke 12: "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you should say." Acts 4 is the fulfillment. The same Peter who denied Jesus three times before a servant girl now stands before the supreme court and speaks with extraordinary confidence.

Peter begins by reframing the issue. "If 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..." The irony is sharp. The religious establishment is putting men on trial for healing. They are prosecuting a good deed. Peter exposes the absurdity of their position before he even answers their question.

Then he answers it directly. "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." No evasion. No apology. Peter names the name, issues the indictment, and announces the resurrection in a single breath. The contrast is stark: you crucified, God raised. Human verdict versus the Lord's verdict. The Sanhedrin condemned Jesus as a blasphemer. God vindicated him as the Messiah.

Peter then reaches for Scripture, quoting Psalm 118:22. "Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone." This text Jesus himself had applied to his own rejection. Peter now turns it directly on the Sanhedrin. They are the builders entrusted with constructing God's house. And they have rejected the most essential stone. They examined Jesus and declared him worthless. But God retrieved that stone and made it the cornerstone of everything.

Then comes the climax. Verse 12 contains perhaps the most exclusive claim in all of Scripture: "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 Greek construction uses a double negative for emphasis. There is absolutely no other. Not one option among many. The only option. And this is not merely Peter's opinion. The word "must" (δεῖ) indicates necessity in God's plan. Salvation in Jesus is not a suggestion. It is the way things are.

This claim sounds narrow to modern ears. We live in a culture that celebrates religious pluralism and views exclusive truth claims with suspicion. But consider what Peter is actually saying. He is not claiming superiority for himself or his religious

tradition. He is announcing that there is actual salvation available in an actual person. If someone is drowning and you know where the life preserver is, pointing to it is not arrogance. It is urgent love. Peter stands before the supreme religious authority of his people and tells them their entire system cannot save them. Only Jesus can.

Luke says the Sanhedrin was astonished when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized these were unschooled, ordinary men. In Greek democracy, the word boldness referred to the right of citizens to speak freely in the public assembly. It denotes confidence, openness, freedom of speech. The Sanhedrin expected cowering submission or theological incoherence from these Galilean fishermen. They got neither. And they noticed something else. "They took note that these men had been with Jesus." This observation explains everything. The boldness did not come from natural temperament or rhetorical training. It came from having been with Jesus. The mark was unmistakable.

Meanwhile, the healed man was standing right there. The Sanhedrin could see him. They could not deny the miracle. In their private deliberation, they admitted as much: "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it." They acknowledged the facts but refused the implications. Their strategy was suppression. Since they could not refute the message, they would forbid its proclamation.

When they commanded Peter and John to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, the apostles' response established a principle the church has followed ever since. "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 have seen and heard."

Notice the language. Peter does not say "we will not stop" but "we cannot." This is not defiance for its own sake. It is the overflow of encounter. Those who have truly seen and heard cannot remain silent. Just as the Sanhedrin "cannot deny" the miracle, the apostles "cannot help speaking." Both are dealing with undeniable realities. The difference is that one group suppresses the truth while the other proclaims it.

The confrontation ends in stalemate. The authorities issue more threats but release the apostles. They cannot find grounds for punishment because the people are praising God.

This passage confronts us with essential questions. Do we have the kind of encounter with Christ that makes witness overflow rather than obligation? When we face our own "Sanhedrin moments," those times when faithfulness puts us at odds with the powers around us, will we display the boldness that comes from having been with Jesus?

The Sanhedrin had education, position, authority, and enforcement power. Peter and John had none of these. But they had been with Jesus. And that made all the difference.

The question for us is not whether we possess natural boldness. The question is whether we have been with Jesus. Because those who have truly encountered him bear his mark. And those who bear his mark find they simply cannot stop talking about what they have seen and heard. This is the witness the world cannot silence. This is the church the gates of hell cannot overcome.