

## ***Unexplainable***

January 23-24, 2021

### 4. Ordinary People on an Extraordinary Mission

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Text: Acts 4:12-13 and 23-30

When I was a teenager, my family would go to the mall. Every. Saturday. Night. It was our thing. I think it was a popular activity for families back in the day. So, we would load up the minivan, my mom, dad, older brother, and two younger sisters. It was awesome. My brother and I got to roam around, and my two younger sisters were with my parents. One time, during these family fun nights, I ran into my parents in the middle of the mall. They asked me if I knew where my sister Susan was. She was only 8, so it was a big concern because she was not with them. My answer was no. I didn't know where she was. So, we waited for my brother to arrive at the designated meeting spot hoping she was with him. As we watched him walking down the concourse, we noted he was alone. We had a family discussion and then broke up into groups to go look. The plan was we would meet back at our designated meeting spot in 20 minutes. We all arrived back. No Susan. We walked over to mall security together. My parents explained my little sister was missing, and we were unable to find her. At that point, the security officer looked at the other security officer working with him and said, "Hey, we have another one." I'll never forget the look of panic on my mom's face upon hearing, "There's another one missing." And what we would find out later was there wasn't a bunch of people stealing kids that day. What we would find out was that there were a lot of kids who just plain got lost! It was part of their daily job to help folks find their lost kids. You know, we're on a mission to find the lost. If you're a follower of Jesus, he has commissioned us to partner with Him to find the ones who are lost.

Today, as we begin part four of our series, Unexplainable, we're going to talk about ordinary people going looking for the lost. Turn with me to Acts, Chapter 4. As we turn to Acts, Chapter 4, I want to give you some background into what is happening here. Peter and John are followers of Jesus, and they're in the temple area. They are speaking to the people after just healing a man on their way inside. Then, they're approached by the priests, the captain of the temple police, and other religious people. (Note religious is different than being a follower of Jesus. You can be religious and be way out of God's will.) So, these religious people who thought they were right with God were greatly disturbed about what was going on. It says they seized Peter and John and threw them in jail because it was evening. They would deal with them the next day. Peter and John had all night to think about what their fate might be. But before the two were taken off to jail, many had seen the miracle of the man who had been healed and heard their preaching about Jesus and believed! The number of people who were putting their trust in Jesus was growing -- it says to about 5,000. Becoming a follower of Jesus was something that was picking up steam, not dying out.

After spending the night in jail, all these high priests gather to question Peter and John. It becomes like a trial. Imagine with me all these important people are gathered to determine the fate of Peter and John, who are in big trouble by the way. The tension is thick. This was no small thing that was taking place. These people were in charge, and they knew a lot. They were highly educated. There was no match between them

and Peter and John when it came to knowledge. The guys in charge begin to question them. It all comes to a two-part question:

1. By what power?
2. Or by what name did you do this? (referring to the healing)

And so, in verse 8, Peter breaks the tension and answers them. Read with me **Acts 4:8-13** <sup>8</sup> *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."<sup>12</sup> <sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."* <sup>13</sup> *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.* This passage goes on to say that they could see the man who was healed standing right there. They couldn't refute his healing! Not knowing what to do, they ordered Peter and John taken away so they could discuss what they could do. They had to shut this down. The rulers of the day began to worry they would lose their own prestige and power. They begin a dialog, "What are we going to do with these guys?" "Everyone around knows they have done a miracle!" "We have seen it with our own eyes; we can't deny it either!" They're getting worried this Jesus movement is beginning to take off. They have to stop it! So, they call for Peter and John to be brought back.

**Acts 4:18-21** <sup>18</sup> *Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you or to him? You be the judges! <sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."* <sup>21</sup> *After further threats, they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened.*

There's a lot going on here for us to process! Peter is filled with the Spirit of God as he speaks, and these educated men are astonished. Verse 13 tells us, *"They saw their courage and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men who had been with Jesus!"* The rulers and elders of the people are taken off-guard by the courage and wisdom that came from these "average Joes." (Or average Peters and Johns.)

Peter and John might not have been educated in the traditional sense. But they had undeniable wisdom in the way they answered because they had been with Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus gave them courage and wisdom in how to respond quickly in the moment. That's living out of overflow. That's a life that has been filled up so much that when they're under pressure and being questioned, they're able to give an answer that stumps them all. I know in my own life there have been times when I just didn't know what to do anymore in my own knowledge and understanding. At times, I have literally said in prayer, "Okay, God, now what?" When we are close to Jesus, we're able to answer out of an overflow. These guys didn't even have to stop and pray and ask, "Lord, how shall we respond to these people in authority that will likely kill us if we get it wrong?" No. They had already spent time with Jesus. Their answers astonished the rulers. *They were ordinary people fueling an extraordinary movement.*

**God is calling ordinary people like you and me to fuel a movement for today.** It doesn't matter what your background is, what your education level is, what you did in your past, or what people have said about you. God wants us to partner with Him and go after the lost! We love to learn things! We want to do things exactly right. We think we have to know everything before we can get started. But what we learn here from scripture is that is simply not true. These guys had not been to seminary. They didn't have degrees. They didn't take church planting 101. They simply spent time with Jesus. They were His students. If we position ourselves close to Jesus, we can become His students. His disciples. Following Jesus sets us up to bring life to people in darkness. **We are His plan for how the lost get found!**

These guys were fueling a movement. It was like a snowball picking up speed and getting bigger and bigger. We might look around and think there is no hope. We may think things are spiraling out of control, and dark days will only get darker. But there is hope if we will act! We must use our words to bring Jesus to those around us. You and I must live on mission. Mission flows out of encountering Jesus both personally and with others.

Peter and John spent time with Jesus, and they spent time with other followers of Jesus. They were advancing the kingdom because they lived in such a way that they were focused on the lost. They said, "*We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard...*" (v. 20). In order to have the boldness that Peter and John had, you have to have an encounter. You have to experience Him firsthand. No one could refute the healing that happened. No one could dismiss what they were saying about Jesus. They had seen things and heard things.

So how do we encounter Jesus? **We encounter Him through His word and through others.** Becoming a follower of Jesus or a disciple of Jesus means that we learn about Jesus. We read about Him in the Bible. We learn from what He said and what He did. We obey what He teaches us through His word.

We also encounter Him through others. This means that we're not in this alone. We are sharing with each other what God is doing in our lives and what He is teaching us through our obedience to Him. A great way to encounter Jesus through His word and through others is by inviting some of your friends, family, or co-workers to grow together in a group. We will have an opportunity coming up here in a few short weeks to do just that. We will be starting a series called, "Made for More," where you can invite people to try out being in what we call a HOST group. A host group is a group that meets for six weeks, needs little training to get started, and will help you encounter Jesus together. It's really that simple. You make some invites, we provide support and step-by-step instruction on how to spend your time together growing in Christ, and you have just taken a step on mission. If you want to take that step, just let us know on your communicator card. Taking a step on mission takes courage! It will stretch you!

Peter and John showed great courage in the face of great danger because they believed the message of Jesus is what was needed most. But they didn't do it in their own power. Peter and John operated out of the power given to them by the Holy Spirit. Verse 8 tells us, "*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit --*" answers them. They were living a powerful, spirit-filled life that prioritized eternal things. They made Jesus first. A movement advancing the kingdom of Jesus lives in an awareness that everything else is temporary.

- Where we live is temporary.
- Our jobs are temporary.
- Our education is temporary.
- This government is temporary.
- Even when we experience sickness, it's temporary.

They were concerned with eternal things, God, and people. They lived with an eternal perspective. They lived out of the truth that eternity with God is found through Jesus. We must live on mission because our mission is what matters in light of eternity. A powerful, Spirit-filled life recognizes that no matter what is going on around us, we serve a higher authority. Even in the face of possible death, it's all good because we are here for a short time. And the reality is, so are the people around us. And so, we live by this pattern we see from Peter and John. They proclaimed Jesus' death and resurrection along with a testimony of a guy that was just healed. When people saw the power of God, they said yes to Him!

Our words are important. They have power. Or not. When we don't get the job, we want – well, at least I have Jesus. When we experience sickness -- all we can do is pray. When things don't go as we think they should in the world -- Jesus is still on the throne. We have heard them all and have even echoed these sentiments from time to time. But these declarations do not come from a place of encounter with Jesus or from an understanding of His power. Jesus is not our consolation prize. He is our first place! He is our everything!

Proclaiming Jesus' death and resurrection along with your own personal testimony gives you credibility. The sharing of your story opens doors. There is something very powerful about your story. It belongs to you. It's your experience that cannot be refuted. Just like Peter and John, the rulers of the day had no good answer for their bold witness. They had to cut them loose. And Peter and John go back to share what had happened and pray.

Let's read **Acts 4:23-31**. *<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. <sup>25</sup> You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.<sup>[a] [b]</sup> <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. <sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. <sup>30</sup> Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." <sup>31</sup> After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

I picture the tone in the room, "People, listen to what just happened to us!" I feel like that should be happening in our small groups weekly. "Wait till you hear what happened this week!" Peter and John share their testimony about being thrown in jail and being threatened, and then they pray! They pray scripture, "Why do the nations

rage, and peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up.” They are acknowledging, yes, there are kings here on earth, but they are temporary. And the most interesting thing is they get done sharing all this trouble they just had, and they pray for more trouble! They don’t pray for peace or an easy time, or for anything that would make them comfortable. They say, Lord, consider their threats and enable us to speak boldly. And we want signs and wonders and miracles so people will believe our testimony!

**Prayer reveals our priorities.** I wonder what would happen if we prayed, “Lord, they are threatening us, but make us bold”? Peter and John believed that people were lost without Jesus. You and I might theologically agree with that statement. We can believe it with our heads. But it has to drop into our hearts. But when we *really* believe verse 12 when it says, “Salvation is found in no other name,” we start looking at people who are far from Jesus differently. Our compassion grows for them. We have people around us who are lost. Salvation is found in Jesus alone.

So, back to my sister Susan, who I shared about earlier in the message. She got lost at the mall. And you know, this was the days before cell phones. So, we had a couple of security guards and gave a list of places an 8-year-old might like to go, and we split up. And when we went into different stores, we told the clerk at the counter, and they joined the search. And people in the stores joined the search. We finally found her at a store called Youthland. And here’s the funny thing. She didn’t know she was lost. She thought she was shopping.

I’m just going to go out on a limb here and say if one of you found out my kid was lost, you would join the search. If I heard one of you had a lost child, I would use my platform, my influence, some of my resources, and whatever other power I had to help you find them. I would spend time praying. I would enlist others for the search. Because I know they are in danger without you.

Author and Pastor Dave Clayton says, “When someone is lost, normal people go looking.” There are people we interact with every day that don’t even know they’re lost. People where we live, work, and play that are far from Jesus and need to hear the powerful words of our personal story about how we have encountered Jesus and how our lives will never be the same. They need to know -- not through a Facebook post or a tweet -- but through us personally, one-on-one sharing in relationship and inviting them in.

We truly are ordinary people called to this extraordinary mission of bringing lost people home. Let’s spend time together praying for a movement to take place. We want people to experience the power of Jesus, and boldly we will ask they experience His power through us.

[We’ll] close by praying for these three things together:

1. Hearts to be broken for the lost.
2. Passion to invite people far from Jesus to be in friendships with us.
3. [And to] live a life as a student of Jesus.