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June 30, 2024

EMBOLDENED: ACTS 4:8-21

The Holy Spirit enables believers to speak with boldness.

Focus Attention Option 1 (ETB LG, 59)

Read: Call on a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 46 of the PSG. Encourage adults to discuss how this scenario of speaking up compares to sharing Christ.

Ask: *Why is it vital that we rely on the Holy Spirit for bold living as well as bold sharing?* (PSG, p. 46)

Transition: In today's session, we'll explore not just the positive consequences of sharing the gospel, but we'll also consider some of the risks involved.

SKIP TO INTRODUCE THE PASSAGE BELOW

Focus Attention Option 2

Discuss: Ask the group if there was ever a time they were frightened to do something. You might help the group by asking: As a teenager were you scared to do something or participate in an activity? What about your first day on the job, were you scared or nervous? How did you feel on the first date with your spouse?

Transition: Many things in life can scare us or cause us to be nervous. Asking someone out for the first time as a teenager. Taking to the father of your would-be future bride. Taking the first step off the edge when bungee jumping. Living out our faith can sometimes be nerve-racking as well. When we have to stand up for godly principles on the job site or the workplace can cause us to become nervous. Likewise sharing our faith with someone can cause us to hesitate. In today's lesson, we will see Peter stand up and boldly proclaim the name of Jesus before a hostile crowd who had the power to do him great harm.

Introduce the Passage: Last week we examined Peter's sermon that followed the healing of the lame man. Peter had learned from Jesus to use good works, like miraculous healing, as a springboard for sharing the Good News of God's Kingdom. Upon sharing the message of Christ many came to faith in the Savior who had died for them. As a result of Peter's actions, the authorities had Peter and John taken into custody. Luke tells us the religious leaders "were annoyed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." (Acts 2:4) The two men spent the night in jail. The following day they were brought before the "rulers, elders, and scribes [along] with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly family." (Acts 4:5) These leaders asked Peter and John, "By what power or in what name

Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *New American Commentary: Acts* (NAC)
- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (HNTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Acts* (Preaching)
- *Unstoppable Gospel*, Gregg Matte

TEACHER'S NOTE: While the "Engage" suggestions in the ETB Leader Guide are interesting and utilize the ETB Leader Pack, I omit the "Greet" section that asks about historical leaders and emphasizes the unique nature of Jesus, because I feel the activity "muddies the water" related to the Aim of the Lesson related to the power of the Spirit to embolden the believer.

A Note on Verse 7: "The question was then posed to the apostles: "By what power or what name did you do this?" (NAC, 142)

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have you done this?” (Acts 4:7) Let’s see how Peter responded and see that “the Holy Spirit enables believers to speak with boldness.” (ETB PSG, 46)

1. TRUTH DELIVERED (ACTS 4:8-12)

Read or have someone read Acts 4:8-12

Ask: By what power did Peter speak? (The Holy Spirit)

Explain: In this passage, see three powerful things at play.

- First, we see the Power of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the believers were indwelt by the Spirit. Today when a person comes to faith in Christ he or she is filled with the Spirit. The “filling” experienced by Peter at this moment was an empowerment. He was already filled by the Spirit, but Luke is telling us that at this moment the Spirit emboldened him to speak truth to power. This manifestation of the Spirit’s power was a fulfillment of what Jesus had promised His disciples in Luke 12:11-12.

Have someone read Luke 12:11-12 (¹¹ Whenever they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities, don’t worry about how you should defend yourselves or what you should say. ¹² For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what must be said.)

Jesus had told the disciples this day was coming, and He promised that they would have the ability to stand. The power to stand is a “special endowment of the Holy Spirit” (NAC, 143) Believers today will have opportunities to speak the Truth of Jesus in a hostile context. We too can rely on the Spirit. “That’s the same Holy Spirit you’ve received if you’re a follower of Jesus Christ. Think about that as you mull over the things that frighten you.” (Unstoppable, 121)

- Second, we see Peter’s Powerful Message. Peter acknowledges the stated reason for their presence before the court: the healing of the lame man. Peter assures them that if healing the lame is the reason they are on trial, then he can clear things up quickly. It is by the name and authority of Jesus that the man was healed. Yes, the Jesus you killed and who God raised from the dead.

We should stop for a moment and understand to whom Peter is talking. Luke has already listed some who were present at this trial. In verse 15 he is going to refer to them as the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin consisted of 71 religious leaders and was led by the High Priest. Membership of the group was made up of members of two religious parties: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Sadducees wielded power over the group. We do not have much mention of them during Jesus’ earthly ministry. This might be because he did not cause them too much harm until the end. This group consisted of the ruling class in Israel and was concerned with maintaining the political status quo with the Romans. Jesus’ “revolutionary” talk near

Notes:

“In fulfillment of Jesus’ promise (Luke 12:11f.), he was given a special endowment of the Holy Spirit to bear his witness with boldness.” (NAC, 143)

“At this point Luke did not use the term Sanhedrin, but it appears at v. 15. The term was also used of minor, local courts; but the reference here was to the supreme court of the land, which held the jurisdiction over the temple area.” (NAC, 141)

“Now they’re looking in the eyes of the same mob [who killed Jesus]” (Unstoppable, 120)

“More important than their theology, however, was their political orientation. Coming largely from the landed aristocracy, they were accommodationists with regard to the Roman occupation of Israel. Possessing considerable economic interests, their concern was to make peace with the Romans, preserve the status quo, and thus protect their own holdings.” (NAC, 139)

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the end of His life would have concerned them. They would have seen Him and His followers as possible threats to peace with Rome. Theological “the Sadducees were materialistic in their outlook. They did not believe in life after death or rewards or punishment beyond this life. They denied the existence of angels and demons.”¹ Peter’s reference to the resurrection of Jesus would have ruffled their theological feathers, but Peter does not stop there. He appeals to Scripture.

Have someone read Psalm 118:22 (²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.)

Jesus quoted this verse in reference to Himself and His coming death in Luke 20:17. Peter picks up on Jesus’ interpretation of the text and tells the court that the Messiah promised in the Old Testament that they killed and God raised is the one who healed this man.

- Third, we see Peter’s Powerful Announcement. Peter doesn’t just tell the court who healed the man. He goes on to reveal something very important about Jesus. Before we talk about that, let’s practice a skill that will help us in our personal reading of Scripture. It is a practice that our Explore the Bible Curriculum calls Praying Scripture. The practice can help us internalize a passage of Scripture and apply it to our lives. We can do that with Acts 4:12

Lead the group in the activity from page 60 in the ETB LG.

“Praying Scripture Acts 4:12

Spend time praying Scripture using Acts 4:12. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Thank God for sending Jesus who made salvation and forgiveness of our sins possible. Ask Him to make you aware of opportunities you have to tell others about Jesus and the salvation that is only found in Him.” (ETB LG, 60)

Following the Activity explain that group members can use these two questions to guide their personal Bible reading time during the week. Ask the group if anyone wants to share their answers to the two questions related to Acts 4:12. (Allow time for sharing and discussion.)

Transition: This verse reveals the truth that Jesus is the exclusive means by which a person can experience salvation from sin. The verse can cause us to express thanksgiving to the Lord for making salvation possible. It can challenge us to share the Good News with others.

Notes:

¹ Charles W. Draper with Harrop Clayton, “Jewish Parties in the New Testament,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 917.

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In this passage, Peter was emboldened by the Spirit to speak the truth of Jesus' healing and saving power. He did so before a hostile crowd. His actions remind us that "Believers can share the truth of the gospel with confidence." (ETB PSG, 54) Let's look now and see how the court responded.

2. SILENCE DEMANDED (ACTS 4:13-18)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 4:13-18

Explain: In verse 13, Luke tells us that the religious leaders were amazed by Peter and John.

Ask: What amazed the religious leaders? (Peter and John were uneducated and untrained)

Explain: While the word uneducated can be translated as illiterate. The biography of Peter and John demonstrated that both men could read and write. Between the two of them seven New Testament books were written (I and II Peter; The Gospel of John; I, II, and III, John, and The Revelation) The word uneducated does not mean they were illiterate. Instead, "they did not have as much education as many men in Jewish society—and certainly not the level of training represented by the men questioning them. Most likely, Luke meant that John and Peter were not the products of a rabbinical school. They did not have the credentials that most teachers and theologians of the day would have had." (ETB LG, 62)

Apply: In our culture, men and women who do not have advanced degrees or who do not speak like well-heeled aristocrats can be looked down upon by some. The witness of Peter and John reveals that there is more to a person than formal training or advanced degrees. A man filled with the Spirit and the Scripture can boldly and powerfully share the Truth of the Gospel. These "highly sophisticated, twitty bluebloods who had come to take care of the Galilean hayseeds" (Preaching, 61) were amazed by their words.

Ask: According to verse 13 what else stood out about Peter and John? (it was clear they had been with Jesus.)

Explain: While Peter and John might be uneducated and untrained, it was clear they had spent time with Jesus. This was probably made clear in the theological accusations. It was probably made clear in the boldness with which they proclaimed the truth. Kent Hughes writes, "When they talked, they were so much like Jesus that the presences of Christ right then and there could not be denied. Peter's and John's companionship with Jesus had transformed them." (Preaching, 64)

Discuss: What characteristics make it obvious that someone is spending time with Jesus today?

Notes:

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Explain: A person who spends time with Jesus will exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and not the “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19-21). The language of the person who spends time with Jesus will be seasoned with Scripture and not peppered with obscenities. The person who spends time with Jesus will be filled with empathy and not judgment. It was clear that Peter and John had been with Jesus. The court did not know what to do with them. They had committed no crime. In reality, they had done something good when through the power of Jesus the lame man experienced healing.

Ask: What did the court order them to do or not do? (“they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”)

Transition: Peter and John were simply doing what Jesus had taught them during their three training years. They helped a man in need. They preached the truth of the Kingdom to the masses. They spoke truth to power using their experience and the Word of God. Now they were ordered to keep silent. Through their experiences we can be reminded that “Believers should expect others to discourage the sharing of Jesus.” (ETB PSG, 54) Let’s see how they responded.

3. TESTIMONY (ACTS 4:19-21)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 4:19-21

Explain: Peter and John said, “Look guys, we get it. You are the court. You can decide if what we are doing is right in the eyes of the law, but we can’t stop talking about Jesus.” Not only *would they not stop* talking about Jesus, were “unable to stop speaking.” The reality of God’s message and the undeniable experiences they had had with Jesus would bubble up out of them regardless of the court’s order.

Tell the story of Peter Cartwright (Preaching, 63-64)

Peter Cartwright was a great circuit-riding Methodist preacher in Illinois. An uncompromising man, he had come north from Tennessee because of his opposition to slavery. One Sunday morning when he was scheduled to preach, his deacons told him that President Andrew Jackson was in the congregation. Knowing Cartwright was used to saying whatever he felt God wanted him to say, regardless of how people might react, they warned him not to say anything that would offend the Chief Executive. He stood up to preach and said, “I understand that President Andrew Jackson is here. I have been requested to be guarded in my remarks. Andrew Jackson is going to Hell if he does not repent.” The audience was shocked. They wondered how the President would respond to this, but after the service, he told Cartwright, “Sir, if had a regiment to men like you, I could whip the world.”...This is how the early church too responded to opposition—with beautiful integrity.

Notes:

“Peter and John had no choice but to defy the court’s order, for it had [as A.T.. Robertson put it] ‘stepped in between the conscience and God.’” (NAC, 146)

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Explain: Like the presence of the President, the court officials facing Peter and John could do nothing to stop the men of God from proclaiming the message of salvation. There was something else stopping the court from punishing Peter and John. They were concerned with public opinion. The people loved them and what they had done. While it might not always lead to a cessation of opposition, there is something to be said about the good engendered by Spirit-led, Christian living. People might not always agree with the message of the gospel, but they cannot deny the work of the Spirit.

Apply: We should fill our community with the work of the Spirit. We can do this through good deeds like Peter and John did when the lame man was healed. We can fill the community with the work of the Spirit when we manifest the Fruit of the Spirit everywhere go. Our small groups can do this when we decide to be a force for good by adopting a classroom or teacher at the local school or committing to bless first responders or volunteering at school or community events. When we fill our community with the works of the Spirit, God's saving message will find ears that are more ready to hear.

Summarize and Transition: The experience of Peter and John before the court reminds us that "Believers are expected to share what they have seen and know with others." (ETB PSG, 54)

CONCLUDE

Summarize: "So the question that confronts you and men in Acts 4 is this: Do we want to be people of courage? Do you want to be known as a man or woman of courage in your family, in your workplace, in your church, in your community, and in your nation? Do you want to be known as a person who stands firmly in the midst of turbulent times? Do you want to be known as a person who declares Jesus to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no matter what the cost?" (Unstoppable, 119)

Challenge:

- (1) "Discuss with your group how you can encourage one another to share Jesus? What habits could your group develop to embolden one another to witness for Christ?" (ETB PSG, 54)
- (2) Discuss ways your group can fill the community with the work of Spirit. How can you get out of the church and into the community in the coming months and bless others?