

Good morning, Fellowship. It's great to be with you as we continue our series in the book of Acts called *Renewal*. Today, we'll be in chapter 4.

Many of you have seen one of the latest social media challenges called the "thenandnow" challenge. Basically, you find an old picture of yourself and do a side-by-side of yourself now. Then and Now. So...this week our awesome communications department helped me assemble my own version. Let's take a look.

Pic 1 – Ah yes. Here's baby me pretending to drive a car and that's me in the fall on a fishing trip over at Possum Kingdom Lake.

Pic 2 – Isn't that sweet. This could also work for the "how it started" and "how it's going" challenge. That's obviously me and my smoking hot wife on our wedding day and us now with our 3 kids. Yes – I married up.

Pic 3 – Last but certainly not least. That's one of my senior pictures and my recreation of that picture just this week. That picture was the result of me going to get my senior pictures taken, the photographer telling me to pose like that, me saying "absolutely not," and my dad telling me to do it. Thanks, dad.

The changes are pretty obvious, right? We can all look at pictures of ourselves then and easily notice the physical differences now – weight gains and losses, wrinkles, hair length and color, height, how we dress, or even the way we smile.

But what if we did a spiritual then and now challenge? What if I said, "Let's put up a picture of your spiritual life from a year ago and compare it to your spiritual life now." What changes would we see? What differences could we point out?

This morning, we're going to walk through a few verses at a time to see a thenandnow moment for Peter. We're going to see how the Holy Spirit had changed and was continuing to change this man – making him look more and more like Jesus.

Here's what it says:

Acts 4:1-2: 4 As they were speaking to the people... Ok. Let's stop there. We've jumped right into the middle of a story that we started last week.

On the way to the temple, Peter and John pass a crippled beggar over the age of 40 – which is an important note. Anyone over 40 with a disability was viewed as incurable. He sat outside the temple every day begging for money. Instead of money, Peter and John give this man the ability to walk. He's healed in the name of Jesus, he gets up, and runs into the temple leaping and praising God which inevitably draws a crowd. Peter preaches about Jesus and His resurrection –

blames the Jews for Jesus' murder and ultimately, he invites the crowd to place their faith in Jesus for salvation.

As he's preaching, the crowd gathered gets a little larger...

4 As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple *guard* and the Sadducees came up to them, ² being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they laid hands on them and put *them* in prison until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

The miraculous healing and now Peter's sermon garner the attention of some pretty important people. Priests, the captain of the temple guard – who was essentially the sheriff and 2nd in command at the temple– and the Sadducees – who were the powerfully, religious elite during this time – approach. The Sadducees rejected the idea of the resurrection which Peter just proclaimed as true. The arrival of these men signals trouble for the disciples.

They don't want to lose their power and influence to anyone, but according to verse 4 it's a little too late. The number of people placing their faith in Christ for salvation continues to grow. They see their influence, authority, and financial gain threatened so they have to shut this down or risk losing it all and so they put them in prison.

We saw something similar to this 2 weeks ago. I am sure you saw it. Two pretty large investment firms, or as you've probably heard them called hedge funds, placed significant bets on GameStop's stock falling. However, a group on Reddit, called wallstreetbets united together and starting buying more of the Gamestop stock – making the stock rise instead of fall. You had the powerful, influential hedge fund groups pitted against the united less wealthy. As the price of the stock went up, the hedge fund folks started losing money and the wallstreetbets group started gaining money. There were several of the billionaires involved in this incident who publicly called out the wallstreetbets group on national tv and social media. They were angry. They were losing money by the billions. They wanted it to stop.

The religious leaders don't want anyone messing with their authority or their money so they're trying to stop or minimize their losses.

Let's keep reading. Acts 4:5-12:

⁵ On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; ⁶ and Annas the high priest *was there*, and Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. ⁷ When they had placed them in the center, they *began to inquire*, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, ⁹ if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and

to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this *name* this man stands here before you in good health. ¹¹ He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, *but* WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among mankind by which we must be saved.”

Peter and John are brought before basically the Senate or Supreme Court – in front of powerful men like Annas the former High Priest, Caiaphas the current High Priest and a few others.

They sat in a semi-circle with Peter and John in the center and ask, “By what power have you done this?” Notice, they didn’t deny the healing because the healed man is standing right there – they knew his healing was legitimate. That wasn’t their concern. Again, they’re concerned with their own status.

By what power have you done this? Is this some sort of David Blaine type of magic trick? How did you do it and who do we need to be worried about?

Verse 8: Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answers...

Ok, what’s going on here? Peter was already filled with the Holy Spirit earlier in Acts. How is he filled again? This verse basically means the Holy Spirit is going to inspire the words coming out of Peter’s mouth. He is going to be with him, guide him, give him courage and boldness. He’s serving as Peter’s teleprompter.

He answers and shares almost the exact same message he shared before. We get our power through the resurrected Jesus – the One you tried to murder. He is the healer, the giver of life author of salvation, and salvation is through Him alone.

Without the Spirit, it would have been easy for Peter to deny everything – Jesus, the resurrection, the miracle, everything. In his own fear he could easily deny everything. You know how we know? Because he already did.

Ready for Peter’s then and now challenge? Let’s talk about his “then” picture. Think about the people present. Peter. John. Annas. Caiaphas. Guards of the temple. They’ve all been together before. Remember?

In John 18, Roman soldiers and Jewish officers arrest Jesus and take Him to who? Annas the High Priest. Peter and John follow along. John goes to the doorkeeper at the courtyard and works his magic – slips him a few denarii – does the secret handshake – gets him and Peter in so they can watch what happens to Jesus.

Jesus is arrested, shackled, questioned by the High Priest Annas, struck in the face, and sent on for more questioning with Caiaphas. This looks like the defeat of Jesus. If Jesus is convicted and sentenced to death – it seems like He and His movement are heading towards defeat.

And as Jesus looks defeated, Peter gets questioned. A girl at the front door asks Peter: “Hey, aren’t you one of this man, Jesus’, disciples?”

Nope. That ain’t me.

As Peter warms himself by a fire someone says: “Hey – you’re not one of HIS disciples are you?”

Nope. Not me.

Then, the cousin of the guy who just had his ear cut off BY Peter at Jesus’ arrest: “Hey – didn’t I see you in the garden with Him?”

No. That wasn’t me.

Are you sure bro – because no one else was slashing people’s ears off? Peter – in the midst of what seems like defeat – when all seems lost – when there seems like there’s no hope denies any relationship with Jesus.

Peter was in a tough spot – a life or death situation. It’s easy to deny in moments like that. I mean sometimes I don’t even like admitting I’m a pastor. I am at a party or meeting people I don’t know. Conversation gets flowing. They end up admitting something immoral or talking in a crass manner.

It never fails, a few minutes later they’ll ask, “SO...what do you do for a living?” Oh, me? Now listen – I have an out. I am also a licensed counselor, so I have an option. Don’t tell the whole truth by saying I am a counselor or admit I’m a pastor. And when I do admit I’m a pastor...

Oh. I see. Hey – sorry about the cussing earlier. It’s okay. You know, I have been thinking about getting back into church. Oh, that’s great. So, what church are you at? Fellowship Dallas. Oh – I’ve heard of your pastor – that Ed Young guy, right? No. We’re a different one. Where’s it at? Off of 75 and park lane. Oh – the one behind the Total Wine? Yep. That’s the one. Oh man, I remember when that used to be a movie theater and bar. Yep. That’s us. Strategically positioned to reach folks like you. Ok – I’ve never said that last part. But you get the idea. It would be easy to deny being a pastor in those moments – now imagine Peter with his life on the line.

Peter, in his fear and prior to the resurrection and Holy Spirit coming into his life denies ever knowing Jesus. That was him then. And now...

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he stands firm in the resurrection of Jesus. He stands with confidence against the very men that conspired to murder Jesus. Peter puts his life on the line and preaches the gospel to them. He's bold. He's courageous.

Let's keep reading.

¹³ Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus. ¹⁴ And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

Peter argues his point with precision, persuasiveness and articulation. He believes in the resurrection so strongly that he tells these people that there is no other way to have salvation but through His risen Lord. We aren't told this in this passage, but Peter believed this message so much that he eventually died on an upside down cross. That's how much he was changed. From denial of Jesus to denial of self. From fear to confidence. Scared to bold.

And listen, he isn't just standing up as some dumb fisherman – stumbling through his words. These religious leaders see Peter as a confident and smooth communicator. One scholar said these guys may have held Peter in the same regard as the great philosopher, Socrates.

What an incredible thenandnow challenge! Peter is a new man!

How did he get here? How did he change?

Look at verse 13. This is my favorite verse in this entire passage.

“...they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

What an incredible statement! The idea is something like “being cut from the same cloth.” Clothing designers and manufacturers use the same cloth for a suit jacket and pants so that they match. They're identical. They're the same.

Being with Jesus makes us look like Jesus. Cut from the same cloth.

Peter, having literally been around Jesus, interacting with Him, watching Him, learning from Him, and now inspired by the Holy Spirit looks more like Jesus than ever before. He heals like Him, teaches like Him, and shares truth like Him. People recognize Jesus in Him. There's no greater compliment for Peter to be recognized as having been with Jesus. He and Jesus – they look the same. He is being and bringing Jesus to the world.

And it leaves this council speechless. They have no reply. They can only threaten them even more – “don't you talk about Jesus anymore.” To which Peter replies, “Can't stop, won't stop.”

Listen. I want you to hear this. God wants to do in you what He did in Peter - as you are with Him - He wants to make you look like Jesus. He did not make you to stay the same – to be stagnant. He’s made you to grow. To be transformed. He wants to change you. He wants to give you the opportunity to look back to some “then” in your life so you can see the “now” He has brought you to.

How does that happen? Let’s close with a few questions.

1. Do you know Jesus? If you don’t it would be impossible to have a then and now spiritual challenge. You’re still dead and trapped in your sins. I pray today is the day you come to know Him.
2. Have you been with Him? Are you spending time with Him – the kind of time that allows Him to change you from the inside-out? Not just being around Him, or going to church, or continuing with Christianity as a hobby. Are you deeply invested in your relationship with Jesus? Maybe your answer is no. I’d encourage you – challenge you – this week and moving forward to start each day with a prayer. “Holy Spirit – this week – as I spend time with you in your Word and in prayer and meditation – will you change me? Will you fill me? Will you give me opportunities to share boldly?” Or maybe in a few weeks sign-up for our Training Experience that will focus on being with Jesus.
3. How have you changed? If we pulled up a picture of you from last year or 3 months ago, would someone say about you, “yeah...they’ve been with Jesus?” There are several markers of us having been with Jesus. There’s the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There’s wisdom. There’s confidence like Peter had. There’s being able to speak truth with grace and share grace with truth. There’s, like Peter, being able to stand for and share the gospel. You might need to ask someone what they’ve seen. I asked my wife this week. She said she’s seen gentleness and self-control lately but she hasn’t seen much joy. So, you can join me in praying the Lord makes me a joyful person.

Some of you may be thinking. Man, I have really messed up. Or...if I look at my then and now picture I haven’t changed at all or maybe I look less like Him. His grace supersedes anything thing you might think you’ve done wrong. Get back around Him and let Him change you.

What does your spiritual then and now picture look like?

When I became a believer in HS, my number one mission was to see my family become believers. My mom and sister became Christians shortly after me. My dad was a different case. I spent the next 4 years praying for him and talking with him. His response one day was, “I’m just not ready. I have too many questions. And when I get those questions answered, I’ll do it.”

My sophomore year of college, my mom called me and said, “I need to tell you something.” Your dad and I have been going to church lately and this morning he met with the pastor and became a Christian.

Amazing, right? But that's not the end of the story. I saw a change in my dad. I heard change in my dad. He began using a phrase with me he never had before, "I'm praying for you." He began living with boldness and courage – seeking the Lord's will for his life. That same year, he began to believe God was moving my family to Arkansas. Before the house ever went on the market – it sold. To this day - my parents talk about that moment. The prompting. The obedience. The fulfillment of being bold and saying no to fear – stepping out in faith.

What was causing these changes? I would go home and see my dad had been reading his bible. He was listening to Bible Studies and sermons on a daily basis. He had been with Jesus and it was changing his life.

Peter's changed life – His having been with Jesus and standing for the gospel lead to an empowerment and boldness for the rest of the believers and it led to them sharing the gospel with boldness. That's what we're told in the rest of chapter 4. And that's my prayer for you. That as you are with Jesus and He changes you – it inspires and empowers everyone around you.

Benediction:

May Christ be seen in us.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with grace and truth.

May the whole world know by the way we live that we have been with Jesus. – Ray Pritchard