



**Sunday, August 13, 2023**

**Speaker:** Pastor John VanderWindt

**Scripture:** Acts 4:1-22

**Sermon:** Boldness to Speak for Jesus

Good morning.

We are a church who dwells here on Sunday, but throughout the week, we are in other places. This week with VERSE week, we have that opportunity to be the hands and the feet of Christ. As we are looking at what it means to be the church, we're looking at the book of Acts. As we're going through Acts, we are seeing how God is working through those people and how it is still today where God is working at pouring out His Spirit among us.

Last week, we were in Acts 3. We have the wonderful story of Peter bringing healing to a man in the temple courts and the people praising God for the healing that was brought. We celebrate what God does in community and we take time to celebrate them. But today, we get the second half of that story in which we realize not everybody celebrates what God is doing. There is opposition to what Peter and John have done.

So today we're going to look at that and we'll look at Peter's response and how that can show us as a church how we need to respond when we face opposition. When we are challenged about our beliefs. And how do we stand in the truth and the grace of Christ through it all? So I invite you to join with me as I read **Acts 4:1-22**. This is the Word of the Lord.

### **Acts 4:1-22**

**1** The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. [Remember, they had just healed the man and were speaking to the people and were telling them about it.] **2** They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. **3** They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. **4** But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

**5** The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. **6** Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. **7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

**8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! **9** 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, **10** 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. **11** Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' **12** Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

**13** 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. **14** But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. **15** So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.

**16** "What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. **17** But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

**18** Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! **20** As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." **21** 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. **22** For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old."

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear Lord, You have given us Your Word. Lord, You have spoken to men of old, to women of the past, to children of today. Through your Word, Lord, we ask that today we may be refreshed and renewed in hearing from You. Lord, may the Word spoken be Your words. Will You open our ears and our hearts to be molded by You and to hear how You too are calling each of us to live a life for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So we have here a gathering of officials who were in the temple at the time of the healing. You see in the first part, there's the priests. The captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees. In **Acts 4:5**, you see the rulers and the elders and the teachers of the law, Annas and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander and the other high priestly family. Here we have everyone who is in authority for the religious leaders. They are gathered together and they are upset with what happened. Not that the man was healed. We need to get that. That's not what they were upset with.

If we read in **Acts 4:2**, it says, "**2** They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." That's what it was.

Last week, we saw that Peter and John spoke in the name of Jesus and proclaimed the name of Jesus and His resurrection, and that's where the power came from. And these leaders are saying, "Wait! We need to stop this!" Firstly, because they are preaching of Jesus who was raised from the dead. If we back up a few weeks, this is the same group that brought Jesus to Pilate. These are the same people who accused Jesus of blasphemy. These are the same people who sent Jesus to die. Now these people are hearing from Peter and John that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Secondly, there's another problem for them. That is that most of the Sanhedrin in this ruling body is made up of Sadducees. Sadducees were a group of Jewish people who believed specifically in the first five books of the Old Testament. And one of their main theological doctrines was that there was no resurrection. That there is no resurrection from the dead.

So now they've got people saying that Jesus, whom they tried to kill, was resurrected. But also as we read in Matthew that these people were so against the idea that Jesus was resurrected that they were proclaiming to everybody that the disciples stole the body and hid it. Now these people are going around saying, "No, we didn't. Jesus rose from the dead." That is what they are upset about. But the problem comes that the preaching comes at the same time as the healing. The healing happens and they can't deny that. The people see the healing and the praising of God. They see the power of God in the name of Jesus. And they are praising God for Him.

So these people come to Peter and John and they seize them. In today's language, that would be that they arrested them and threw them in jail. Notice that it says that they put them in jail until the next day because it was evening. An interesting piece of a Jewish religious law was that if you were on trial, as a person, for committing a crime against another person or against theological doctrine, that trial had to begin during the day and it had to end during the day.

Because it was near evening, they're like, "Well, we can't really start this now because we won't be able to finish it before nighttime. So we're gonna throw him in jail and we'll deal with it tomorrow." Do you remember a trial a few weeks before this? When did the trial of Jesus happen? In the middle of the night. There was another incident where the Sadducees and the ruling body went against their own beliefs to try to overthrow our Lord.

So they put Peter and John in prison. It says the next day - but we need to look at **Acts 4:4** for a minute because it's so easy to go, "Well, they seized them, they put them in jail. The next day, "Let's get to the trial." But look at **Acts 4:4**. Verse four says, "**4** But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand." That's 2,000 more than we had just a few days ago at Pentecost. That was put in the middle here. Why is that not at the end of the story? I wonder if it's in the middle to remind us that in the midst of opposition, God is at work. The power of God's message is not only in times of good but the power of God's message happens in the midst of persecution and opposition.

We are blessed to live in a country where we may freely serve God. On Sunday morning, we can come here and we can say, "You know what? I don't have to worry about driving. I don't have to worry about parking up front and walking into a building which has "church" in really big letters on it. But there are lots of places in the world where that doesn't happen. There are lots of places in the world where the government has made Christianity illegal. According to Open Doors over the last few years, there have been about 6,000 people killed each year because of naming Christ as their Lord. And not only 6,000 who have been killed for directly saying it but there's probably been at least that or more than that killed for indirectly being connected to the faith. And here, in the middle of a story in which there is good news, Luke reminds us that when there's opposition, God is there as well. The spirit of God is working and powerful and He is bringing people to Him.

We need to take a moment to think about that. There are many people in the world today who are gathering in a place of secret who have sought for fellowship, community, and prayer in a place in which their lives are threatened. We need to make sure that we spend time in prayer for those brothers and sisters in the Lord as well. But I think it asks a deeper question. If that were me or if that were you, would you go to such a gathering? Would you be willing to say, "I believe that Jesus is the only way?" That there is no other way, as we read little later, about how salvation happens than through the name of Christ? I trust that I am in that place. But there are some days that I wonder, "Would I be able to do that? Luke puts that in the middle of this passage to remind us that in those places, God is there. And then show us how we, in face of opposition, can be the church and that Jesus is there with us.

So the next day, Peter and John appear before this ruling body - the Sanhedrin - 71 people sit in a semicircle. You stick Peter and John right in the middle. Everybody can see them. They can see each other. And here, the first question comes at the end of **Acts 4:7**. "By what power or what name did you do this?" To Peter and John, that's a very familiar question because they've heard it before. When you look back and look in **Matthew 21**, there is a piece in which the same people come to Jesus and they say to Jesus as He's healing people and teaching, "By whose authority do you do this?" It's that question of, "What credentials do you have? We, as part of the ruling body, have been to seminary. We've got our degrees. We've been taught by the Pharisees and the best of the best. Where have you gone? Oh, you haven't! Ha! You don't have any authority!"

Jesus, back in **Matthew 21** says, "Tell you what. I'll answer your question if you answer mine. Where did John the Baptist get his authority from? God? Or from people?" So this group of teachers and leaders come back together and they go, "Well, that's a problem. If we say God, then he's gonna say, "Well, why didn't you listen to him?" But if we say "the people," they're gonna go, "Hold on. We love John the Baptist. He was great." And they're gonna start to discredit us.

So they refuse to answer. And Jesus did the same. So now they come to Peter and John. They say, "By whose authority are you teaching?" Peter and John respond with (1) boldness and (2) kindness. They respond with truth and with grace. They begin with a question. In Acts 4:8, it says, "8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit... " That's important to note.

Oftentimes in the New Testament when you have someone speak, it will often be side noted or important noted that he is filled with the Holy Spirit. It's not the person speaking. It is the Holy Spirit speaking through him. It's important to note because there are times when we face opposition or when people ask us questions and we're like, "I have no idea how to answer that one." And we say, "Lord, will you give us the words? Will you give us the words to share so that Your name may be honored and glorified?"

So here we see Peter, filled by the Holy Spirit, and he begins with this. "Rulers and elders of the people!" Notice that he gives them the position of authority which they deserve. He does not belittle them. He does not give them sass back. But he says, "I understand that you are the rulers and the leaders of the people. I place myself under you for that." Then he asked the question, "If we're 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... Notice the question. The question says, "Are you bringing us in because of healing this person? Because of doing an act of kindness? If that's the case, then here's my answer."

But notice what Peter draws out. Peter draws out the love of God extended to his neighbor. Peter draws out the fact that it is God being witnessed through people that is bringing others to Jesus. The religious leaders are stuck on a doctrine. Peter says, "This is God's hand working through people." That's what's bringing people. That's what's drawing people to God. Then he says, "If that's the case, then I'll tell you who's been healed." In **Acts 4:10**, "**10** 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."

It gets back to what we said last week about doing things in the name of Jesus. He answers their question. In fact, he answers their deeper question. Their deeper question is, "We don't believe in the resurrection." Peter says, "If you've brought us in because we healed this man, then you need to know this. It is in the name of Jesus that he was healed and Jesus was resurrected." It is that resurrection power by which he is healed." So we have the aspect of truth and grace being given.

Then Peter responds by quoting a piece from Psalm **118:22**. It says, "**22** The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone..." This verse was actually quoted by Jesus in Matthew 21 as well in the same setting. And the Sadducees that heard Jesus say this as well. The Sadducees, being well scripted in the Old Testament, knew what this meant. In fact, they would often use it in the sense of, "There will come a time when someone who the world rejects will be the Messiah of the Jews and will recreate the city of Jerusalem, the kingdom of God, and it will be that." So Peter is now saying, "Jesus is our cornerstone."

This morning, we sang a song which talks about a cornerstone. I think we need to go back a little bit and look at the significance of what cornerstones actually meant at that time compared to now. When you construct a building and as you drive around the city, you can see buildings being built. You will see the framework going up and it's been architecturally designed to create this massive structure which will stand. In biblical times, there were certain stones which were important to a building. There were the individual stones used to build it.

There were what they call capstones, which when you build an arch, it is that center stone in the middle of the arch that holds everything in place. But the most important stone was a cornerstone because it is the stone which is laid first and everything else from that building is measured off of that stone. So if that first stone is not perfectly square, your building is going to be out. If it is not perfectly level, your building is going to be out. Everything gets measured from that one stone. In fact, if you would remove that stone, it is possible that that corner and then the rest of the building would collapse.

So when we say that Jesus is our cornerstone, that means Jesus is our measuring point from which everything else in our life begins. Jesus has to be that person with whom we measure everything else. So everything else we do has to come back to, "What does Jesus say about that?" So Peter says, "He is the cornerstone." Then he says in **Acts 4:12**, "**12** Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." It is pretty simple in Peter's mind. Jesus is the cornerstone and if we are going to be saved, you have got to believe in Him. It is that simple.

Now imagine standing there and hearing Peter talk. This is the same man who, a few weeks earlier at a campfire, when a young lady said to him, "Aren't you with Jesus, that Galilean?" Where Peter took an oath and said, "I don't know the man." Notice how he has gone from a person who doesn't even want to identify with Christ to a person with great boldness and says, "Hear who Jesus is." The Spirit of God has filled Peter and given him boldness. The Spirit of God fills us and gives us boldness to speak the name of Jesus. The Spirit of God has filled Peter with wisdom to be able to respond with kindness and with truth. To be able to not react and fly off the handle but to calmly answer the truth of Christ and what God has led him to.

So here we have Peter in that changed place and they even notice it because in **Acts 4:13**, it says, "**13** When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished [Unschooled and ordinary doesn't mean they didn't know scripture. Peter is a good Hebrew and would have gone to Hebrew school. He studied Scripture. He knew scripture. It just meant that he didn't have the credentials which we talked about earlier.] But then notice this next line - "... and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." That's where they got their schooling from.

They had spent time with the cornerstone. They had spent time with Jesus learning what wisdom really is. A disciple in the time of Christ would be one who would live with a person for a length of time to learn not just what they know but how they think, how they respond, how they act, what they do. When we are reading this, did you see how close it was to the way that Jesus responds to this same group of people? The story doesn't change, really. There are people who are in opposition of Christianity, and that story from the time of Pentecost till now has not changed. People still say, "Who gives you the right to say that?" And we say, "Is it because we've done something good that you are asking us? If that's the case, then the person who gave us the right to do that is the person who has all authority in heaven and earth and that is Jesus Christ. We do this in His name. Jesus is the one who directs us in our acts of kindness and in sharing truth."

So Peter and John were noticed because they spent time with Christ. I ask that same question of myself. And I invite you to ask that question of yourself. When people see you, when people see us as a church, do they take notice and say, "These people have been with Jesus? Are these people different in a way which displays the kindness and the truth of Christ?" **1 John 1:1-3** reads this way, "**1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. **2** The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. **3** We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

That is who we are. We are people who have fellowship with God and we have been with God. When we are with God, people will take notice. So the Sanhedrin leave. They say, "Excuse me a few minutes, guys, we need to discuss this in private." And they discuss it. Their discussion is similar to what they had when Jesus asked them the question, "Who gave John the Baptist authority? God or man?" And here they are going, "Okay, so what do we do? If we tell them, 'What you've done was wrong,' we can't deny that that happened. It's a good thing. Good for everybody. Right? It's one less person who's begging at the temple. That person that can now live. They can also make money and tithe for the temple. It's better all around."

So we can't tell them that. We can't put them in jail because, well, really, they haven't done anything wrong in their actions. Right? They were abiding by all civil and religious rulings. It wasn't Sunday when they healed the man. They weren't in a wrong place in the temple when he healed the man. They really didn't do anything wrong. Okay, the only thing we can do is tell them to not preach about the resurrection." So they come back and they call him in again and in **Acts 4:18** and tell him, "Just don't speak in the name of Jesus." And Peter and John replied, "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."

Now, this phrase, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you or to him?" is a phrase which, throughout church history, has been used and sadly, sometimes abused.

The important part of this phrase comes at the end where it says, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." What they are saying is, "We have been with Jesus as you have noted, and we can't help but speak about what we have seen and heard about Christ. Unfortunately, sometimes throughout church history, people have said, "Well, I think this needs to be done and I'm saying that God told me to say this." So they say this is the way it is. The question we have to ask ourselves is, "Is that what Jesus is saying? Is that what fellowship with Christ is really all about? If it is, we need to speak with boldness, we need to speak with kindness, we need to speak truth and grace, and we need to be steadfast."

Peter doesn't back down. It says in Acts 4:21, "21 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. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old." Peter doesn't stop after this. We read how Peter continues to preach.

But notice, Peter's preaching is always done in boldness, in kindness and with wisdom. He stays steadfast and he makes sure that he is with Jesus. And that's what he preaches. He preaches fellowship with Christ. That's what he preaches. For there is no name under heaven by which we may be saved except in Jesus.

Philippians 2 has that same piece come through in Peter's writings, where he says that one day every knee shall bow under heaven and earth and acknowledge Him as Lord of Lords and King of kings. Jesus invites us to be part of that kingdom, to be part of His service, to be part of a way in which the boldness of Christ is lived through us. But also to do it through kindness and in wisdom. This week, we have the opportunity to serve our community. I guess the question which I ask is, at the end of the week, people whom we serve... will they say, "I noticed that you were with Jesus." Or will they say, "I noticed you did this on your own." Peter says, "Do it all in the name of Jesus. Don't be shy about that. Don't be shy about saying, "I am here because I love God and I love people." If they respond in a way which is oppositional then you, with kindness and respect, just let them know who Jesus is. Show them the love of Christ and be the love of Christ.

On Saturday, when we have our Fun Fair and we're having the opportunity to serve our neighbors, may it be a time in which those who come say to us, "There's something different. Why is it? Who is it that you've been hanging out with because I want to hang out with him too."

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank You for the gift of salvation that comes in You. Lord, we pray that You will be with us each day. That you will give us boldness and wisdom in times of opposition. Lord, we pray especially for the people throughout the world who, this day and every day of the week. proclaim your name with boldness, knowing that they could be killed for it. Lord, we ask that You will protect them, that you will be gracious to them, that you will allow them to feel Your presence and that even through those difficult times, that you will continue to draw people to You, that we may continue to see the number of Christians and countries which are being persecuted continue to rise. Lord, we pray that you will continue to grant us freedom. Lord, help us not to take it for granted but help us to live each day as living for You with boldness and wisdom and extending Your love to those around us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*