

Sermon #42  
Acts 4:1-22  
June 21, 2020 **Title Slide, slide 1**

### **The Fellowship Emboldened (Part II)**

*“Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason and not by Popes and councils who have so often contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the word of God. To go against conscience is neither right nor safe. I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me”*

These are the infamous words of the German monk, Martin Luther, when defending his faith at the Diet of Worms. He attempted to reform the church officials of his day, by showing them how far they had drifted from the Word of God. He began his reform work by posting a document of his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church on October 31, 1517. That is, he saw the need to correct 95 practices in the church, chief among them the practice of selling indulgencies for absolving of sin. Only Christ can do that through faith, Luther maintained. The church leaders did not respond affirmatively to his renewal efforts and called him before a large council of leaders.

It was there at the Diet of Worms, before a large assembly, that he uttered these words of conviction. “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.” Luther was later excommunicated from the church and had to do much of his future work in seclusion. But he never gave up and never recanted. He stood emboldened on the Word of God.

Many others, such as Bishop Polycarp in the second century, John Hus in 1415, John Wycliff, the first to translate the Bible into English, were all martyred. Others, in more recent years, like Richard Wurmbrand were tortured for their faith but continued strong in the faith. In his case, the Voice of the Martyrs, was begun to help others stand boldly for the Christian faith even in persecution.

But let’s bring this to a little more current setting. Remember back to Columbine high school when teenagers said “yes” to Jesus in the face of their attackers? Cassie Bernall is quoted as standing firm, saying, “Yes, I believe in Jesus,” in the face of a gunman. Another wounded victim, Valeen Schnurr, who later survived, was quoted as saying something similar. Both stood strong against their perpetrators. Now, you and I hopefully may never face that type of trial, but are we willing to stand firm in our faith through the power of God’s Spirit? Can we stand strong like these girls and remain unmovable like Martin Luther of old, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.”

During this season of Pentecost, we are journeying with the early church as on day of Pentecost, the Fellowship began with the Holy Spirit power. Then we saw the Fellowship grow in their faith. Last week, we saw a specific healing of the lame man, as the Spirit enabled Peter and John to do a mighty, amazing miracle, as the Fellowship was empowered. Today, we continue with part II of that same story and look deeper at the power encounter, as the Fellowship is emboldened.

So, like the late Paul Harvey, we might say, “And now, the rest of the story.” Chapter three tells the story of the healing and Peter’s explanation. Chapter four has the encounter of the disciples before the Jewish Council. They are not happy. In fact, the Jewish religious leaders are “greatly disturbed” by not so much the healing as the explanation of a risen Jesus having done the healing. So, they seize Peter and John and haul them off to prison, even while they are still preaching to the people. How rude!

In this story, we see three groups of people gaining power or losing it. How did the group with power receive it? And what were the results? And how does their emboldened spirit contrast with those without it?

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- I. The disciples are emboldened.

All throughout the book of Acts, we see the powerful results of former lowly fisherman changed into powerful agents of God’s grace and truth. The 120 disciples, praying in the upper room, were filled with a bold power like never before. God’s Spirit within them enables them to speak powerfully in his name and perform great miracles also in his name. And many people come to know Jesus as their Savior. What an amazing turnaround!

Now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they have healed a lame man from birth, who is now enabled to walk, jump, leap, and praise God, and even enter into the temple courts to worship God for the first time. Now Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin, made up mostly of the Sadducees who do not even believe in the resurrection. And they testify boldly to the healing power of the name of Jesus. Remember last week we noted the importance of the name of Jesus in healing this man. Here again, before the Jewish council, the disciples rely again on the name of Jesus to speak truth and power.

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Before the council Peter aptly states, “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” (v. 10). Peter continues to quote from Psalm 118, that “the stone you builders rejected... has become the cornerstone,” referring to Jesus. And that’s what the Jewish leaders did not want to hear.

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Furthermore, Peter succinctly affirms, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.” The word for saved here is also big enough and similar enough to include physical healing. Jesus saves, Jesus heals.

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Even when the Sanhedrin forbids Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus, they respond boldly again, as they declare, “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” (4:19, 20). They leave the council praising God for what has happened.

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So, all throughout this story, the disciples, the first group, are speaking truth boldly, as Luke says three times here in the narrative. They speak, preach, and defend themselves with great boldness (4:13, 29, 31). The word here in Greek, *parrasía*, can mean “openness, confidence, boldness, frankness – a freedom to say all.” It was considered an obligation to speak the truth for the common good. From this Greek word, we get our English word parrhesia, which in rhetoric is a figure of speech meaning: “to speak candidly or to ask forgiveness for so speaking” ~~For~~

In Spanish there is a funny idiom, which states, “No tiene pelos en la lengua”, which literally means, “He or she doesn’t have any hair on the tongue.” The symbolic application means that this is a person with no fear to say whatever is needed. Not even hairs on the tongue can keep him or her from speaking the truth or whatever is needed for the moment. Thus, this word makes me think of that phrase.

With the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John do not have any hairs on their tongues anymore. They speak the truth boldly. And this continues throughout the book of Acts, as the word is used eleven times, including the very last phrase of the book! In Acts 28:31, the last verse, Paul is in house arrest for the gospel while in Rome. People come in and see him and he proclaims the good news of the kingdom of God freely to all. And he does so, according to this last phrase, “with all boldness and without hindrance!” It’s not just a little boldness, but all boldness. So, the church, the fellowship of believers from its birth at Pentecost (chapter 2) all the way to the end of the book continues to proclaim the good news of Jesus with all boldness throughout. That is God’s powerful, emboldened church! Praise God!

So, the disciples are the first group we look at – a group that is emboldened to be God’s powerful people. We add to this first group, a second one, the people themselves, the crowd of on-lookers that has been amazed with wonder from the start.

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II. The people are emboldened.

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Now here in chapter 4, even after Peter and John are hauled off to prison, the people believe. In fact, five thousand people believe in Jesus. Now the number of believers has grown even more exponentially. This group of people, like the disciples, believe. Even those who did not believe were still in wonder. And Luke tells us in verse four that “Many who heard the message believed” (4:4). One might think that once the ring leaders are taken to jail that those behind would fizzle out in their faith. But that’s not what happens. In fact, they believe.

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Then later in chapter four, we see the people (the new believers) pray boldly and speak boldly (4:23-31). They pray to the Lord who made the heavens. They quote scripture (Psalm 2), and they request God’s further protection and boldness to speak. What they have accomplished is not enough. So, they pray, “No, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness” (v. 29). And after they pray, the place where they were meeting was shaken (as on the day of

Pentecost) and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (v. 31). God’s Spirit has now enabled them all to speak the word of God boldly, the same Greek word we noted earlier.

Elijah Lovejoy was a great American hero, editor, schoolteacher, and Presbyterian clergyman. He left the pulpit and returned to the press in order to be sure his words reached more people. After observing one lynching, Lovejoy was committed forever to fighting uncompromisingly the awful sin of slavery and racism. Mob action was brought against him time after time; but he was never deterred. Repeated destruction of his presses did not stop him. He boldly proclaimed his stand for Christ. “If by compromise is meant that I should cease from my duty, I cannot make it. I fear God more than I fear man. Crush me if you will, but I shall die at my post...”

And he did, four days later, at the hands of another mob. None of the mobsters was prosecuted or indicted or punished in any way for this murder. (Some of Lovejoy’s defenders were prosecuted! One of the mob assassins was later elected mayor of Alton!) However, one young man was deeply moved by the Lovejoy martyrdom. He had just been elected to the Illinois legislature. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

Oh, what God can do through people who stand firm, people who stand up for their faith and for a biblical cause of a just life. God’s spirit breathed power into the crowd who believed and became his empowered church. That would continue through the saints of old like Socrates who said to those who judged him, “I will obey God rather than you.” And throughout history, God’s Spirit would continue to embolden his followers, Martin Luther, John Hess, and today Richard Wurmbrand, Cassi Bernal and many others to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ no matter what. That’s the first and second group, the disciples and the crowd who believed. The third group, however, presents the contrast. This is the group that loses power, and they are not happy about it.

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III. The religious leaders are minimized in power.

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As we’ve already noted, this group began “greatly disturbed” in the beginning of the story (4:2). They are worried about the disciples’ power, and that’s the only thing they really question them about. In verse 7, they bring in Peter and John and question them, “By what power or what name did you do this?” They are not so concerned about the lame man himself. He is standing right there, a reality they cannot deny. They saw the former lame man standing there and concluded that there was “nothing they could say” (4:14). So, the main question is, “where did the power come from – what name?”

The religious leaders are not happy about the response. When Peter and John reply that the healing was done in the name of Jesus, they command them not to speak in his name anymore. They fear the name of Jesus and they fear the loss of their power. Everyone seems to be going the way of this heresy, so they think. So, they threaten the disciples not to speak in his name anymore and then release them. Now maybe their power over the people will return. [This is the same tension that Jesus had](#)

with the religious leaders and the same that the early church will have for the rest of their existence in Acts and up to today.

How would you describe yourself today? Is God's Holy Spirit power boldly speaking and acting through you? Do you sense his power, his wisdom, his love speaking through you today? It's not all about the great signs of power, it may also be in the smaller ways, of simply caring for someone in need, standing up for someone when they speak the truth, living with peace when the times are chaotic, marching peacefully for a just cause, writing letters to leaders in high positions, not doing the wrong that others tempt you to do. The list goes on and on. If you sense yourself lacking in any way, pray the same prayer that the disciples prayed. "Oh, Lord, embolden us with your powerful Spirit. Fill us today, fill me today, to speak and live out your word with boldness and power. Amen." (Applications to today)

#### Conclusion

"Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me." Do you need to take a stand this today, this week? Let God's Holy Spirit power flow through you as you surrender to him. Let's follow the way of the disciples, and the new believers in the crowd who increased their power and not follow the way of the religious leader who trusted in their own minimized strength. Take your stand today along with all the emboldened followers of Jesus Christ.